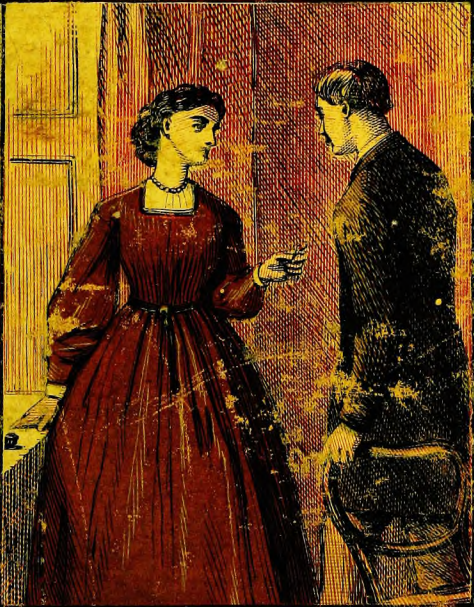
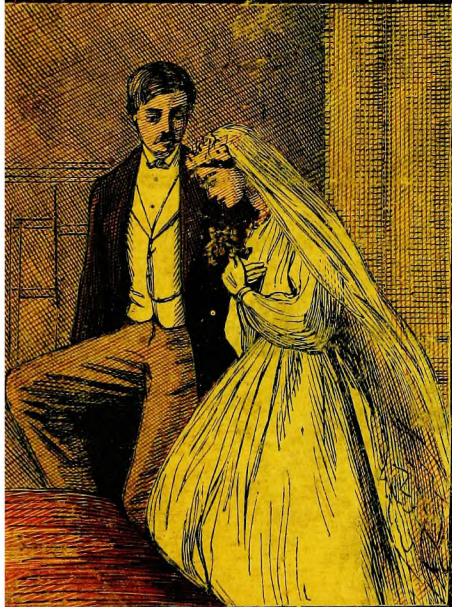
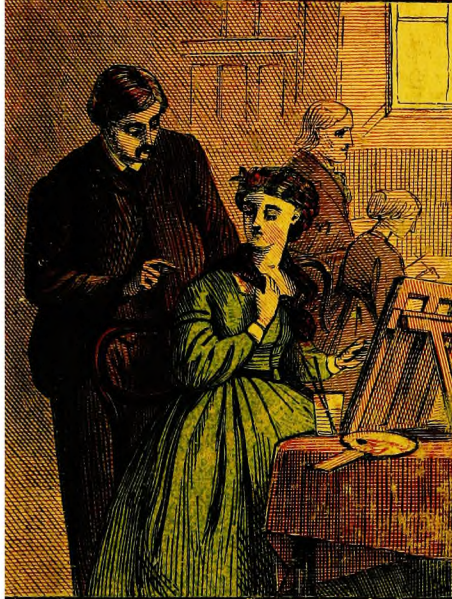


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JAMES H. GRAFF,

BALTIMORE

N^o 1849

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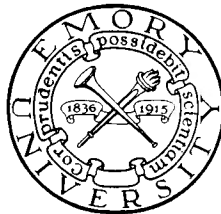
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SECOND EDITION.

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CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY
1867.

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FOR A PIN.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH.

God said, Let there be light, and there was light. Poor human creatures! who vaunt so much the particle of the divine breath that animates you and inflates your pride, how many of you must unite their efforts to create——
A PIN!

Let us count them: 1st, Complicated machines, animated by the force of steam, and aided by a multitude of workmen, produce in a great factory the brass wire which is to become the pin. 2nd, The straightener takes the bend out of the wire and cuts it up. 3rd, The pointer sharpens the ends of the wire on the grindstone. 4th, The shankcutter gives the pin the required length. 5th, The coiler rolls the wire into a spiral to form the heads. 6th, The headcutter divides this spiral into heads and fixes each of them. 7th, The annealer gives them the necessary toughness to bear the stroke of the hammer. 8th, The shaper of the heads gives them an elegant form. 9th, The scourer gives them a first cleansing. 10th, The whitener coats them with tin. 11th, The slaker washes them in cold water. 12th, The polisher whirls them

rapidly round in a cask full of bran. 13th, The sifter separates the pins from the bran. 14th, The pricker makes rows of holes in paper. 15th, The paper filler sets up the pins in the holes. A great number of persons are engaged in each of these operations, and I passed through more than a hundred hands before I became an article of commerce.

CHAPTER II.

ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD.

I WAS packed up with some millions of my kind, despatched by a swift conveyance, and sold for the service of the civilized world as slaves whose silence might be depended on. The case which served us for a prison was opened in an elegant wareroom, and we were tastefully arranged in large crystal vases. It was a place where fair ladies bought perfumery, gloves, ribbons, and pins to fix them with. A lady's maid, after a long conversation with the nice young man who presided over the department, took me, with a laugh, out of the crystal vase and stuck me in her neck-kerchief; and that was how it happened that I was transported into a splendid house in the quarter of the Chaussée d'Antin.

CHAPTER III.

GRANDEUR AND DOWNFALL.

WHAT sumptuousity! As I looked around me in that magnificent mansion, I thought of the hundred miserable artisans to whose combined toil I owed my triumphal entry, on the bosom of a lady's maid, into those gilded saloons.

"Be quick, Julie!" cried a sharp voice, from a boudoir hung with silk. "That ribbon—you have had it made?"

"Here it is, madam; you can't think what a difficult thing it was to match the colour."

"Hold your tongue, mademoiselle, and give me a pin."

Julie hastened to take me from her neck-kerchief and hand me to her mistress, who was looking most intently into the glass.

I was skilfully applied to fasten a very elegant tie on my beautiful mistress's neck. The carriage was at the door, and she was just going out. What a delightful good fortune for a new comer! What curious things I was about to see and hear! The footman lets down the steps of the carriage, and off we go.

But, in the middle of the courtyard, my mistress leans over the carriage door, to give some orders, and out I fall, aye, fall between two paving-stones of the large court. It was full of people going in and out, and was flanked with great ranges of offices, in which, as well as I could make out, numerous clerks were busy receiving and paying money, for all the people that came in carried big bags of coin, or pocket-books that seemed to be well lined.

My head remained resting on the edge of a paving-stone,

and I was able to take note of a good-natured and sedate-looking young man who had just entered the yard. First he paused, and seemed as though he were pondering something in his mind; then he went back a few steps, and, lastly, he summoned up courage and advanced resolutely, but sadly, towards a large glass door inscribed *Cashier's department*. His countenance and demeanour interested me, but I should have liked to be nearer him, the better to know him; for I had remarked that I possessed the strange gift of divining, by contact, the character and disposition of those upon whose persons I was placed. "If he would pick me up," I said to myself, "I should be glad to attach myself to him." But his thoughts were elsewhere; the ingrate did not notice me.

I saw him come out soon afterwards through the glass door, and the person who opened it for him appeared, from his looks and gestures, to be telling him that something which he earnestly desired could not be granted. Nevertheless, upon his further entreaty, the head clerk pointed to the windows of the principal part of the house, from which I had just come down in such brilliant company, and even went so far as to desire one of the boys about the office to show the young man into the presence of the head of the house. In a few moments more I saw the latter exchanging a very few words with the visitor.

"Try me," the young man seemed to say, with a look of modest self-confidence.

"I really cannot," was as manifestly the reply of the head of the establishment, as he bowed slightly, with the air of a busy man dismissing an applicant.

I saw the young man make his bow, with a sad smile, and retire with his handkerchief to his eyes.

Very slowly he descended the three steps of the marble peristyle; very slowly he crossed the large yard, with his eyes bent on the ground. A sunbeam shone upon my little head at the moment he was passing. His eyes rested on me, and never before had I felt such a pleasure. He stooped down, picked me up, wiped me carefully, and placed me on the sleeve of his coat, which, by the by, was rather tight for him, and a good deal worn.

At the same moment we heard the large window on the first-floor open, and a voice call out:—

"Baptiste ! tell that young man to come up immediately. I want to speak to him."

Then a Swiss in livery politely requested *us* to go up again to that first-floor whence we had just come down, he with so heavy a heart, I with one so joyous.

The master of the house was a man of finely-moulded and intelligent countenance. His forehead was high and bald, his eyebrows and beard were black, his head grey, his eyes quick and keen. He looked silently for a while at the new comer, and said to him, in a prompt, business-like tone :—

"Sir, you stopped just now in that yard, and stooped as if you had found something precious ; you picked it up, I believe. May I ask what was the value of the thing that caught your eye ? "

The poor young man was dumbfounded. Perhaps he had quite forgotten me, or else he was ashamed to confess that he had stopped for so trivial a reason. Meanwhile, as he cast down his eyes on his sleeve, he saw me bravely lifting up my head ; and, drawing me out, and showing me piteously to the banker,

"I entreat you, Sir," he said, "to excuse a very puerile habit of mine ; my poor father, whom I have lost, taught me to pick up a pin, and I did it in memory of him, and in compliance with the habits of order he wished to impress upon me."

Then he replaced me on his sleeve.

"My lad," said the banker, "you have no occasion to blush, and you must not believe that it is nothing to be able to pick up a pin. It is so much the reverse, that I, who had no need of your services, as I was sorry to tell you just now, am at present resolved to give them a trial."

He wrote a few words, rang a bell, and said to the lad who answered it :—

"Take this gentleman to the head of the correspondence department."

And he dismissed the new recruit, saluting him with a wave of the hand.

The banker was Baron Wolff, a man whose capacity had placed him in the first rank of the financial world, and whose business connections in both hemispheres were innumerable ; a man, moreover, of spotless probity, and who

was well skilled in reading the characters of men, and distinguishing their several aptitudes. A considerable part of his vast fortune was employed in encouraging useful arts and enterprises, and in helping the unfortunate. What a fine thing is fortune, what an excellent power is that of gold, when it falls into such liberal and pure hands! Accordingly when the baron looked after his young *protégé* as he passed out at the door, it was with an earnest wish that the horoscope, which as yet rested only on my small head, might be justified by the first trial.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRIAL.

AGAIN we open the large glass door leading into the counting-house. We are taken to the head of the correspondence department, who reads the orders of his principal, and looks with surprise at the new comer, as if the task upon which he was to be tried was evidently beyond his powers. He went himself with him into the large room, which was railed off into compartments, as a map of the world is divided into various states. The chief clerk passed by England, Germany, Russia, the East Indies, and stopped at a compartment inscribed *Canada*.

There he placed a chair for the candidate, and said to a clerk,—

“Bring this gentleman the despatches from Canada. You have two hours, Sir, to examine them and note all the orders contained in them, and you will take them to M. Wolff at one o’clock precisely.”

I was aware, through contact, of the thoughts of my worthy young man, and was pleased with him. Thanking the head clerk, he sat down to work, confidently but unostentatiously. His first look was given to the poor little pin which had gained him admission. Then he thought of his father and his good counsels, of his mother who was still so anxious about his prospects, and of that Providence which was perhaps affording him an opportunity to be of use to those who had great need of his aid ; and

having fortified himself with these salutary reflections, he bravely opened the Canadian packet.

Canada, as I have learned from a pin of that country, is a land full of life and sap, in which civilization grows and spreads with great rapidity, and all eyes are turned on France, the beloved and revered mother country ; a land abounding in the richest productions of nature. Cities are founded and developed there, on the ancient territory of the Iroquois, even before the geographers of our country have time to register their birth. I have been told of the oldest native inhabitant of a city of forty thousand souls, and the age of that venerable senior is sixteen years and a half. Activity like this infers great wants, an appeal, incessantly renewed, to the creations of a more advanced civilization, an exchange of the natural productions of the soil for the productions of the refined industry of the old world. Hence a vast commerce, and a manifold correspondence, circulating with feverish rapidity. People are in such haste to live, to enjoy ! Orders must be executed with the swiftness of the wind that fills the sails, or the steam that drives the packets at full speed.

The new clerk knew something of this when he plunged into the huge mass of the day's correspondence. He took great care to classify its diverse contents in an orderly manner, putting in one heap the bills of exchange and other negotiable paper ; in another, the papers relating to matters in litigation ; and, in a third, the orders to buy and sell ; for, besides its banking business, the house of Wolff carried on a commission and export business, which gave employment to a great number of hands. He drew up a list of all the orders, made an abstract of the legal details, gathered up the negotiable paper in a bundle, and presented himself again to M. Wolff.

"Already !" said the baron, with a smile ; and then, after a glance at the *débutant's* admirable handwriting, and his even rows of figures—

"You speak English ?"

The question was answered in the affirmative, and the conversation was continued in that language.

Though Canada formerly belonged to France, and French habits still prevail in Lower Canada, English is the language of the country, that in which correspondence is

carried on, and a knowledge of it was indispensable to enable the young man to acquit himself of his task with honour.

“You have been in England?” said the baron, astonished at the purity of his young clerk’s accent.

“No, Sir; but my mother, who was highly educated and spoke English perfectly, taught it us, and I have sought for opportunities for speaking it. I thought it no breach of duty, as a good Catholic, to go after mass to the English church, where I had the pleasure of hearing excellent pronunciation and sound morality.”

“Shake hands!” said the banker, warmly; “you belong to us. And now, tell me, what is your name? and from what quarter I have received so welcome a recruit? whom, but for a pin, I should have let slip through my fingers, though I pique myself on my discernment in matters of physiognomy.”

CHAPTER V.

WHENCE WE COME.

THE young man was of prepossessing appearance, as we have said, and his age appeared to be a little over twenty. His large eyes were soft and bright, both qualities being enhanced by their long lashes and their finely-formed brows. His forehead was broad and high, white and smooth as that of a girl, for no evil thoughts had yet sullied its unruffled purity; and his glossy black hair clustered luxuriantly round an oval face expressive of frankness, serenity, and self-possession. His full lips were shaded by a light moustache, and a beard was beginning to show itself upon his chin. His figure was tall and well knit, his costume rather out of order, it must be confessed, his demeanour natural and unembarrassed. Greatly encouraged by the baron's cordial manner, he continued the conversation in English, for he saw what pleasure his new patron took in conversing in that language, which is in Europe the language of commerce, as French is the universal language of literature and polite society.

"My name is George, my age twenty-two, and I belong to a family of artists. My father died, worn out by excess of toil; and my mother, who was left with many children, and no other resources than her own courage, made it avail to provide for our education. She wisely dissuaded me from choosing the hazardous life of an artist, and all I long for is the time when I shall be able to be of use to her, and relieve her from the burthen of maintaining the family. She

is living in the country. After I left school, I spent some time with one of our relations in Germany, learning foreign languages and commerce; and, since my return, I have sought in vain for employment. Every door has been closed against me for want of references, and, but for this pin, which I will always keep as a precious talisman, I——

The banker had listened with the greatest attention, looking into George's expressive countenance with a penetration which might have embarrassed a less open nature.

"Very well," said he, "I require no other reference from you than yourself. You shall have charge of the Canadian department, and conduct the correspondence. Your handwriting pleases me, and that is a point to which I attach much importance. Foreigners will naturally judge of the care we take of their business by the precision and clearness of our reports. I lost one of our best correspondents because your predecessor wrote too slovenly a hand, and turned down the heads of his d's like weeping willows. Speak little, listen much, and never answer as to anything which you do not know exactly. Keep clear of bad connections, form no friendship here with anybody without informing me, and think often of your mother. The thought of her will sustain you in your hard toil, for the steam is always at full pressure here, and we do not spare ourselves. As you have no relations in Paris, you will have your room in the house, and two thousand francs salary to begin with. Now good-bye."

All this was said in English, in the quick distinct tone that was habitual with M. Wolff. But he had not said all he thought of the happy manner in which George had, in so short a time, got through the formidable heap of work set before him.

"That is the man for me," he said to himself; "zealous and composed, well-informed and modest, unassuming and self-reliant. How many a one we must reject before we light upon his equal! The lad will make his way."

CHAPTER VI.

PROGRESS.

M. WOLFF had not exaggerated when he said that the steam was always at full pressure in his establishment. A most agreeable man he was, saw a great deal of company in his own house, went constantly into society, bestowed a lover's attentions on the fine arts, took a lively interest in public affairs, and discharged the duties of charity with a willing heart, and yet he managed, by some inscrutable means, always to be found in his business, always. Long before day he had written several letters, and gone round his offices, giving a look into each department, judging of the absent from the state of their papers and their pen, and never tolerating an irregularity, still less a minute's want of punctuality.

In going his rounds in this way one morning, M. Wolff found George at work at his desk by the light of a lamp that was burning low, and so absorbed in business that he did not hear the baron come in.

"Here is a well-guarded house!" said the latter. "How did you get in, since I found the bolt double shot in the safety lock, and have just unlocked it?"

"Pray excuse me," said George, "but a very urgent affair with Montreal was to be put in order by this morning, and I could find no other way. Thank heaven, the job is finished, and I believe that by writing this morning to Havre your interests will be made safe."

So saying, he laid before the banker the vouchers for an

important amount due to the house, with all the documents necessary to recover it whilst there was yet time.

"I ought to scold you, George," said M. Wolff; "for you set a bad example. You are master here, then? Even so, you ought to have consulted me. How weary your eyes look. Go and lie down for a few hours, and sin no more."

Then calling him back, kindly, after running his eye over the papers,

"George," said he, "you are a brave lad; your mother is happy in having such a son. Take care of yourself for her sake. I was very desirous of finishing this affair with Montreal, for these people are shaky, and the amount is considerable. It was for the very purpose of seeing how you stood with it that I looked in here, for any delay would have been fatal. So you have done very well for me, and perhaps for yourself."

In spite of warnings, it happened more than once again to George to get scolded for working at unseasonable hours, but he always excused himself on the ground of urgency, and begged pardon so unaffectedly, that M. Wolff was every day more delighted with the capacity and modesty of his young assistant.

CHAPTER VII.

FASHIONABLE SOCIETY.

M. WOLFF remarked that George was always plainly dressed, and sometimes negligently.

"George," said he to him one day, "a careful man like you naturally takes care of his money. Have you any objection to show me your book of income and expenditure? Do not be offended; it is for your own interest that I make this request. I am afraid you do not consider your salary sufficient."

"Quite the contrary, my dear Sir," replied George. "Thanks to your liberality, I am able to save money."

And he handed M. Wolff a canvas-covered memorandum-book. M. Wolff looked over it, after apologizing, and gave it back without saying a word, for he was unwilling that the emotion he felt should be perceived.

George had sent his poor mother more than half his salary; and, furthermore, disposed of some crowns in acts of benevolence.

Next day M. Wolff said to him:—

"You must do honour to my house, George. I often receive Americans who cannot speak French, and your help may be useful to us in the drawing-room. We expect you at dinner; but your outfit shall be at my cost. You will receive three thousand francs salary, and the first quarter is due."

It was without the least embarrassment that poor George found himself, at seven o'clock, seated at a sumptuous table, surrounded by people of fashion, and of fortunes widely

different from the penury in which he himself had lived. Certainly it is not for a young man to be forward to speak in company. He should be like the harp, that discourses harmoniously only when interrogated by skilful fingers.

I can bear testimony to his success, for, with an attention of which I was very sensible, George had not forgotten his faithful companion. He had taken care to remove me from his working coat, and fix me firmly on the sleeve of the new coat, which, with its simple good taste, showed his good looks and the elegance of his figure to the best advantage.

A grave and impassive man of business in his closet, M. Wolff became at table a delightful companion, and a brilliant conversationist in the *salon*. Above all, he possessed the very rare gift of knowing how to bring out the shining qualities of those about him, as the rod of Moses made water gush from the rock, or as the electric chain produces the spark from afar. When the conversation turned upon horse-racing, fashionable displays, and the elegancies of the day, George maintained a becoming silence, and appeared to listen with interest. But presently he was questioned as to some particulars of his German experience; and as he had observed much, and the arts, monuments, and antiquities of the country were known to him, he could maintain his opinions with an unobtrusive firmness which encountered no opposition.

Madame Wolff was a very lady-like person, exceedingly graceful, and exceedingly frivolous. She regarded as a curiosity that grave personage of five-and-twenty, who most conscientiously discussed questions of Teuton archæology, and left in his glass the golden vintage of the Rhine, which was not neglected by the other guests.

"Do tell us, Monsieur George," she said, in that high-pitched and drawling tone which some ladies of fashion affect, "do tell us the story of that marvellous pin of which we have heard so much, and which you still wear, I believe, on your sleeve. It is a very precious talisman, I suppose?"

The eyes of all present were turned upon the poor young man, and upon my poor little head, which was indeed brightly conspicuous on the new coat.

George, who was full of self-possession when he had to speak of his studies, his duties, or his business, became very timid when he himself was the subject of conversation, and,

above all, when a young woman, whom he could not help perceiving to be charming, addressed him in such a manner before a large party.

"Madam," he said, in a tone of much feeling, "let me be allowed to regard as a talisman this little pin, which rescued me from a position full of anxiety for persons who are dear to me, and which, thanks to M. Wolff's kindness, has gained me admission into your house. I know the obligations which such a favour imposes upon me. I will always keep this precious pin, that it may remind me of them should I ever chance to forget them."

A murmur of approbation followed this modest reply. The story of the pin was recounted and commented on by a committee of inquisitive ladies, who looked at the hero of the adventure as they talked in half whispers. To escape from this scrutiny, George continued a conversation with the persons next him on the Dusseldorff school of painting, the principal masters of which he had known.

The company withdrew to the *salon*, and a lady sat down to the piano. Hers was one of those genial talents that instantly arrest the attention and touch the heart. In her performance there was none of that triumph over difficulties which make music resemble a battle, and gives the performer the air of a St. George combating the dragon. There were floods of harmony, and sweet reveries, so vague that the soul felt rapt and enchanted.

"*Encore! encore!*" cried the audience.

"And that delicious nocturne of Schubert's," said M. Wolff, "with which you almost made us weep, shall we not have it this evening?"

"I have not four hands," said the lady; "will you help me?"

There was a dead silence.

"What a pity!" said Madame Wolff; "have we no one here to second you?"

"If I might presume, Madam," said George, "I would offer to accompany you. I have often heard this favourite melody of the Germans, and, I believe I remember it."

The volunteer was applauded, and that admirable piece made a deep sensation. A repetition of the last part was called for; it was executed with still more feeling and expression than before, and the lady appeared quite sur-

prised at finding such precision in the performance of her *accompagnateur*. M. Wolff, who was an impassioned *dilettante*, was in raptures.

"So you can do other things besides cyphering, Master Slyboots," he said, taking George familiarly by the ear.

"Is it your pin, too," said Madame Wolff, "that has taught you to charm us all? You will lend it me, at least."

George bowed, in a state of confusion that made him still more interesting, and withdrew from observation amidst a group engaged in conversation.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PICTURE GALLERY.

ONE day, when George was with M. Wolff in his private room, after a long and earnest conversation on commercial matters,—

“Enough of business for to-day,” said the banker. “Tell me, George; I listened to you the other day in the drawing-room: you have some pretensions to be a judge of painting.”

“Not the least pretension,” said George; “but I have seen many pictures, and beautiful things give me pleasure. How many happy days have I spent with my dear father in the galleries of the Louvre! We enjoyed them like discreet epicures, sometimes resolving to look at only three pictures, but to see those three well. When that was the case we advanced cautiously, with our heads bent, pursuing the long lines of the polished floor, and counting the bays by the pedestals of the statues. ‘We are come to it,’ said my father, and then we raised our eyes before a Correggio, a Raphael, or a Leonardo da Vinci. We came with our minds fresh to the contemplation of those incomparable *chef d’œuvres*, and I sat before them with a beloved being by my side. My father explained to me as an artist, a connoisseur, and an erudite man, the differences which characterize the several schools, and related the curious anecdotes connected with the celebrated painters, whose lives, like those of the saints, have become a Golden Legend. Happy time! Those glad days will never return!”

“And why not?”

“Because the season of pleasure is past for me,” said

George. "Sorrow, which comes always, came betimes for me. I have been compelled to sacrifice my tastes, and I assure you that I even find a pleasure in this sacrifice; for work under you, Sir, who received a total stranger with such fatherly kindness, is very sweet to me, and very salutary."

"Well, then, to-day," said M. Wolff, "since you are so submissive to my wishes, it is my pleasure, Mr. Philosopher, that instead of carrying on a correspondence, you shall do something in the way of art. It is a splendid day. Follow me, and keep your eyes bent, if you like, on the lines of the polished floor, since that is your way of seeing museums to the best advantage."

He then took him through two or three saloons, and opening a folding door and a heavy curtain behind it, with a certain air of display,—

"What do you think of this, Monsieur le Connoisseur?" said he.

It must be stated that Baron Wolff's collection was a celebrated one, known to all the amateurs of Europe. George found himself in a long gallery, chaste and excellent in style, supplied from the roof with a soft and well arranged light. The gallery contained nothing mediocre, nothing dubious, nothing superfluous, but specimens of each school represented by the respective masters, and of each master only one picture, and that a *chef d'œuvre*. The pictures did not press upon each other, like people packed together in an overfilled omnibus, but each picture rested on a green ground, and between every two there was a wide interval, and these intervals were filled with marble statues, some brought from Italy, others due to our charming and fecund French school. George was dazzled at first. The authenticity of each picture was as evident as if the painter was there to sign it. It is needless to say that the Italian school reigned supreme in that palace of art; that the Roman school was conspicuous for ideality, that of Florence for purity, that of Venice for brilliancy of colour. The Spanish school was represented by a Murillo, for which the sovereigns of the world would have bid fiercely against each other, and by a magnificent Velasquez. Teniers, Rubens, and Van Dyck transported the spectator to the best days of the Flemish school. As for the Dutch,

what a faultless selection of those masters, so amusing, and so full of variety, whom one is never tired of admiring ! An interior by Gerard Dow, a landscape by Ruysdael, a bouquet of flowers by Van Huysum ; nothing was wanting.

As for the French school, the happy possessor of the gallery had not failed to introduce into it the most esteemed masters. Claude Lorrain, Greuze, and Prudhon shone in it, surrounded by the satellites of that luminous and fecund constellation which is called the French school.

George was silent and abstracted. He had remarked in a corner a small picture which had made a strong impression upon him ; but he did not wish to let his emotion be seen.

"You say nothing," said M. Wolff. "This collection does not seem to you worthy to interest an amateur ?"

"Everything in it is sublime," said George ; "I see nothing to change ; it would be impossible to make a better choice. I could tell the name of each painter as I walked round the gallery ; they are genuine. One could spend his whole life in this paradise, in admiring nature poetised by art, in imploring the benediction of these Holy Virgins ! What a fine thing is a fortune that allows one to be the sole possessor of such treasures ! I should like to grow rich."

"There's my philosopher out already," said M. Wolff. "Don't you see, my envious gentleman, that there is a diamond wanting in this crown ? Look round here for the great master of Parma, the regenerator of art. I lack a Correggio."

"You shall have one ; but I know not if it is from having beheld so many fine things all at once, I who can only see three in one day," said George, laughing, "but I feel greatly fatigued, and can barely see and speak. I am unworthy to remain here longer ; nevertheless, I should be delighted to be allowed to come again."

M. Wolff was rejoiced to have a connoisseur under his hand.

"Not only shall you come again," he said, "but it shall be your duty to come and work here. I have sought out this means of withdrawing you from your other occupation, to which you apply yourself too eagerly. Will you be the keeper of my museum ? If you can enjoy things without

possessing them ; if, for an artist like you, to see is to have, these pictures will belong to us both. Mr. Keeper, your salary is two thousand francs. You will be in communication with artists, picture dealers, and amateurs. The first work I bespeak from you is a *catalogue raisonné* of my collection. I have long wished for it, but have not the time at my command. I give you *carte blanche*."

What a godsend for our George ! He was by nature an artist ; all his instincts urged him in that direction, though reason and necessity had bound him down to more positive occupations. It was an irksome lot which he bore with resignation, and nothing could be more welcome to him than the baron's proposal.

He entered at once upon his functions, and applied to his new labours the spirit of order and method which was habitual with him in all things. The pictures in M. Wolff's gallery were arranged at hap-hazard, or rather in accordance with their dimensions or their general effect. In his catalogue he classified them by schools, gave the precise dimensions of each, and wrote a short notice of every painter, and an exact description of the picture, abstaining from the exaggerated expressions which are common in the catalogues of professional connoisseurs, but dwelling carefully upon the particulars which attested the authenticity of the work. When the manuscript was finished, scrupulously revised, and a fair copy of it made with that precision in which M. Wolff delighted, he laid it on the baron's desk in his private room.

M. Wolff looked over the manuscript, intimating his satisfaction from time to time ; but at one point he exclaimed :

"Oho ! I have caught the Admirable Crichton tripping : 'ALLEGRI, surnamed Correggio : *Misfortune*, female head.' You have mistaken the signature, and a very natural mistake it was. The picture is a charming study by *Allori*. The similarity of the names misled you. I thought, however, I had told you that a Correggio is among my desiderata, and one that I miss most sorely."

"And I think I replied to you," said George, "that you should have a Correggio."

"What do you mean, Sir ? Do you suppose that I lend myself to this kind of legerdemain ? I would have you to know, my young friend, that everything in this sanctuary

of art is pure as refined gold, and that fraud shall never enter it."

"Far be from me all idea of fraud!" said George. "I confess I have not examined the signature attentively; but I am bold to affirm that it is a delicious Correggio. Have the goodness to read the few lines that follow the title of the picture."

"Let us see, then," said M. Wolff.

And he read: "ANTONIO ALLEGRI, surnamed Correggio: *Misfortune*, female head."

"Do you sincerely believe it, George?"

"Read on," was the reply.

"A girl, in a meditative attitude, is drawing over her bosom a light black drapery, which had slipped from it and left it uncovered. A pale star shines on her forehead. The ideal expression of the head, and the faultless execution of the hands, suffice to identify the master. The harmonious tone of the black drapery relieves the white shoulder where life is circulating in the delicate blue veins. A good copy of this picture is preserved in the Munich Museum. The precious original, which we have here before us, belonged to the celebrated Dusseldorff Gallery, and was admired there under the title of *Misfortune*, which we have retained for it in memory of the misfortunes of the master."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed M. Wolff. "But we must have the proof. Come, come!"

And he hurried George, with passionate eagerness, into the gallery, where the beautiful face of the *Misfortune* wore its unchanging look of divine tranquillity. M. Wolff cautiously took down the picture from the wall.

"*Allegri!*" he cried, as he deciphered the half-obliterated name.

George examined the other side of the picture, which was painted on an old panel of wood, and sought for some other evidence in support of his assertion. Presently he read, almost under the inner edge of the frame, *Parma*, 1525.

"*Allegri! Parma!*" cried M. Wolff: "George, I am too happy; embrace me, my son!"

And he threw himself into George's arms, as soon as he had most carefully replaced the picture.

"An old Frankfort Jew sold it me, twenty years ago, for five hundred florins, as an Allori. I did not haggle with

him, for I thought the picture exquisite. I would not part with it to-day for ten times that sum. But what a humiliation! I have all this time possessed such a treasure without knowing its full value, till at last a mere boy comes and opens my eyes. There is some witchcraft in the matter. George, I shall come at last to believe in your talisman."

"It is the simplest story in the world," said George. "You noticed my emotion the first time I entered your gallery. This beautiful head was well known to me, and I was quite surprised at finding it here, more lovely than before. It is the companion of my days and nights."

And opening his pocket-book, he showed the astonished banker a very finely executed drawing of the picture, beneath which was written: "*From Correggio, Munich, May, 18—.*"

CHAPTER XI.

THE APPARITION.

NOTHING was talked of in the drawing-room but George's discovery, and M. Wolff's good fortune in possessing Correggio's *Misfortune*. The fact was beyond all doubt, the proofs were certain. George told how his uncle, who was a merchant in Germany, had employed him in travelling on the business of his house, and how his taste for the fine arts always made him a visitor to the public galleries, in which he collected interesting notes in Dresden, Vienna, and Munich. In the latter, the city of the arts, he received news of his father's death, and fell into a state of deep depression which he could not overcome. The sense of duty, however, and the thought of what it now devolved on him to do for his family, sustained him in some degree, and he tried to resume those studies which were his only solace.

It was in this state of feeling that he sat down one day in one of the splendid halls of the Munich Museum. But he could see nothing yet ; he could only think of his good, kind father, and reproach himself for every day he had been absent from him. Had he but been able to hear his last words, receive his last farewell, and feel that venerated hand resting on his head, before it returned to everlasting rest !

He had been for some time absorbed in these meditations when he chanced to raise his eyes. An apparition was before him, half evanescent in the subdued light. It was a young maiden, whose expression was more beautiful than beauty. The bitterness of sorrow had passed over her brow, but left it pure, and her clear steadfast eye defied

anguish, as the virgin martyr, entering the circus, defied Cæsar, when she declared, in thrilling tones, "I am a Christian." That beautiful figure, modestly bringing a black drapery back to its place on her uncovered bosom, seemed to speak to him with the voice of a beloved sister, and say, "And I, George, have I not suffered? Have I not lost what was dearest to me? Am I not left without a stay, alone in the world? Yet I have confidence; I will live upon the memory of the past. But you, George, have more than memory; you have duties. You have a mother who awaits you to dry her tears, sisters whose support you will be, and friends who will console you." All this did she say, that beneficent fairy, and many other things besides.

He rose to listen to her still, but the illusion faded away. He had awakened from his half-sleep, and was standing before Correggio's *Misfortune*.

Very often did he seat himself again before that confidant of his sorrows. He had found the expression which corresponded most nearly with his woe. All conversation was painful to him, but these mute communings with the *Misfortune* soothed him.—The time came when he must depart. He obtained permission to make a drawing from the picture, which was only an admirable copy executed by a German painter of the 17th century. Thus he procured, and always carried next his heart, the image which accorded with his inmost feelings, and thus, too, he was enabled to reveal to M. Wolff all the worth of that treasure of which the latter had been so long possessed.

CHAPTER X.

THE WAGER.

ARE not some fair dames of the highest fashion very pitiless? Want of occupation, the lassitude of pleasure, and the torment of curiosity, fill them with strange whims. To while away that age which elapses between the last trying-on of a new dress and the first visit, between the return from the ride and the dilatory hour of dinner, between the concert and the ball, they must needs make discoveries, devise adventures, and lay wagers. These fair dames have around them dangles, dandies, loungers, nice men,

“So gentle, yet so brisk, so wondrous sweet,
So fit to prattle at a lady’s feet;”

but they get tired of them, they tolerate and despise them. Yet they are just such a frivolous court as befits the frivolity of the sovereign. Who better than they can tell her the latest news of the turf, the little scandals of the day, the ticklish adventure of the slips or the *bal masqué*, and, more important thing than all, the “feeling” on the Stock Exchange, and the latest quotations? But what pleasure is there in captivating people who let themselves be led captive without the least difficulty, and complacently allow their nullity to be trailed in the wake of a petticoat? There needs something better than that to tempt the palled appetite of a *blasée* lady millionaire.

But if there be found an earnest man, one who is an utter stranger to the thousand freaks and frivolities that fill up

the life of a fine lady, that is the man to be angled for, the man whose devoted homage must be secured at any price. He must be vanquished and brought helplessly under subjection, and then the victor may laugh at the fettered slave.

These reflections, which bear only upon a small minority (Heaven forbid that we should mistake the exception for the rule), these reflections are *à propos* of the frivolous conversation which took place among a few intimate friends in Madame Wolff's boudoir.

"My dear," said a fair visitor, "he is a downright savage, is your favourite, your M. George; you will never make anything of him. He is here in his person, which is very presentable, it must be admitted; but his mind is elsewhere, and his heart is I know not where. Have you remarked with what coldness he listens to us? It is extremely polite, but under that faultless politeness there is an indomitable pride; and if there is on one side of a drawing-room a conversation going on between a number of pretty women, and on the other between solemn debaters, he soon forgets us and goes off to the black coats. Now, in all this, under an appearance of simplicity, there is a tinge of pedantry which is not at all flattering to you."

"And what do you say," said another kind soul, "to that mystification of the magic pin, and the affectation of always wearing on his sleeve that precious talisman, price one sou per quarter of a hundred? Did you remark the other day at dinner with what an imposing air he set forth to us the merits of his pin?"

"Oh, but my dear," said a young English lady, "don't you know that it is a fairy pin, and that it guides him to the Beautiful and the Good as surely as the needle would guide you to the pole? I am sure it would be a good thing for me if I could find such a compass."

Having listened to all this talk with a certain air of disdain, as she reclined on a couch, Madame Wolff said, in a languid voice, with a half smile,—

"George will do in this house as everybody else does. He will do what I please, and when I please he will give me that pin, and he will fix it with his own hand in this ribbon."

"But the pin is his whole fortune," said the credulous

Englishwoman. "In Scotland, too, we have talismans that do wonders. Do you imagine that without such help M. George could have discovered in your gallery a painting by Correggio, which would fetch a thousand guineas in England? I defy you to get his breadwinner from him?"

"If I choose to take the trouble," said Madame Wolff, "I will have it this evening; and as a proof that it is the very same pin, you will nevermore see any on his writing-master sleeve."

This jeer was thought very amusing, and in good taste.

"What will you bet that he will not wear his pin this evening?"

"Ten louis you will not have it!" said the Englishwoman.

"Twenty louis I shall have it!" said Madame Wolff, sitting up briskly.

"I should like to know," said a young lady, turning round from the piano, "what this poor young man has done to you. Either he does not care for his pin, and in that case what credit would there be in carrying it off? or, he wishes to preserve it as a souvenir, and if that be so, it is very wrong to conspire to deprive him of it. You complain that this young fellow reasons soundly, and only speaks in his turn; have we not plenty of scatterbrains who do not reason at all, who know nothing and talk about everything? I give you notice that I take him under my protection."

"You may be his guardian angel, and shelter him under your white wing," said Madame Wolff; "but keep a good look out if you do, for the bet is made, and I am determined to win it."

The amiable person who had taken the part of the oppressed, was the same lady who had found in him so good a second at the piano. She was of an Italian family, her name, Mademoiselle Borghèse. She was very good-natured and less frivolous than those about her, because she knew how to employ her time. She was passionately fond of music, and excelled in it, and so she was a great favourite at Baron Wolff's, and her intimate friends called her simply Borghèse. She had no pretensions to beauty, and the artist-like independence of her character disinclined her to marriage. Her tone and manners were such as are

commonly designated by the epithet *bon enfant*, and as her fortune was considerable, nobody was offended by her plain dealing.

The ladies took leave of each other with a promise that they would meet again in the evening, to know the event of the wager.

CHAPTER XI.

ANTIOPE.

BORGHÈSE, if we may presume to give her that familiar name, used to spend a part of the year in that brilliant and hospitable mansion. She had apartments in it, and knew its inmates and their ways.

She knew quite well, for instance, that after spending the morning with M. Wolff, George used to go at noon into the picture gallery, to continue a matter on which he was engaged there.

There was a winter garden connected with the gallery by two arcades, and it was admirable to see the marvels of art and those of nature thus brought into mutual conjunction. This fine covered garden sloped down gently, with many winding paths and undulations of surface, from the picture gallery, on the first floor, to the large open garden. The choicest plants were preserved in it; and groups of orange trees, myrtles, pomegranates, camellias and rhododendrons overhung a little silvery rill that threw itself merrily into a rose-tinted marble basin, and sprinkled its white foam over the arum flowers, making them look like vases of frosted silver filled with sparkling champagne.

It was a delicious lounge, where everything invited to repose and reverie. Borghèse knew well that at no other hour and in no other place could the lady of the mansion find her victim; so, entering the winter garden before her by a back door, she seated herself within a thick clump of magnolias, and waited.

George was already in the gallery, giving directions to some workmen, who presently departed.

The perfidious baroness tarried a while longer, for she had to prepare for the combat. Presently she came in through a low door, sauntered along the winding paths that led to the open door of the gallery, plucking the roses and scattering their petals as she went, passed very close to Borghèse without seeing her, and appeared, after some hesitation, on the threshold of the gallery.

Poor George! so simple and unsuspecting, in face of so much artifice and subtlety, will you let yourself be caught in the snare? If I could warn you! I am but a little pin, but woe to you if you cannot keep me!

The syren had chosen the costume most in harmony with the scene in which she was to figure. Her hair, of the lovely hue in which the Venetian masters delighted, was gathered into thick plats, and formed a voluminous knot on the back of her head. She wore a very simple morning dress, and on her breast a knot of ribbons, the uneven ends of which fell gracefully down. And the daughter of Eve began again, in her pasteboard paradise, the eternal scene of the temptation.

She coughed slightly to attract the attention of George, who rose, bowed respectfully and seemed disposed to resume his work.

"Oh! I beg pardon, Monsieur George," she said, "I thought I was alone. Tell me pray, if I do not disturb you too much, what is the name of that singular plant that trembles when I touch it, and that seems to be afraid of me? Is it not strange? And yet I do it no harm."

"As well as I remember, Madam, it is a variety of the acacia, which possesses the properties of the sensitive plant."

"And to what, Monsieur le savant, do you attribute this sensibility of a little twig, whilst many persons would touch my hand without the least emotion?"

"I believe, Madam," said George, speaking in sober earnest, "that the poets have very gratuitously imputed feeling to this innocent shrub. I think I have heard it stated that the warmth of the hand acts on the very delicate vessels that contain the sap, and then——"

"And then—that is just the way with your learned

pundits; they strip the poetry from everything. Why not let us believe that Clytia turns to the sun, that the narcissus looks into the water to see its own image there? Has not everything in nature a voice and a feeling?"

"Pray pardon me, Madam; I believe that poetry has its seat in our own souls. It is an exalted sense of things that kindles our imagination; and this poetry, this sense, we attribute to the inanimate objects around us. Thus the willow weeps over graves, because its fine waving foliage resembles the unbound tresses of a mother who weeps as she kneels and bends over a cradle."

"Do you know that it is not a very cheerful vein of talk you have hit upon? Could not you find me some comparison a little less lugubrious?" said the lady, with a languid air, laying herself down on a couch.

Then she raised her shapely arms above her head, in the charming attitude which the painters have given to Erigone, and plucked a fine pomegranate blossom from an overhanging branch. She put the stalk carelessly between her lips, that vied in hue with the blossom, and then she stuck the flower in her girdle with some affectation.

"For my part, I like better to believe that the murmuring brook calls with its sweet voice to the thirsty bird, that the gentle breeze caresses me, and that the echo is a friendly voice that replies to mine.

"But you yourself, Monsieur George, who play the hard-headed philosopher with me to torment me, you, too, have your weaknesses, and that eternal pin that you wear, as a corporal wears his stripes, is a proof of your credulity."

"Then excuse this weakness, Madam; you may laugh at me as much as you please, but, as I have told you, I have found here a family, friends, and generous hospitality. It is a puerile vow, no doubt, but a sincere one, to preserve this token to which I owe all these blessings, and if any sacrifice——"

"That is very fine," said the lady, with a little touch of irony in her tone, and a somewhat sleepy voice. "Well now, if I were to ask of you the least sacrifice of your tastes, of your most trivial whims, the sage, the philosophic George, just now so full of gratitude, would not listen to me."

"Can you believe me so ungrateful, Madam?"

"Give me that pin," she said, in a low voice, closing her beautiful eyes.

George was beginning to be very much embarrassed.

"I feel sleepy ; these orange flowers all round us stupify me with their perfume. George, you are hard to deal with, you will give nothing for nothing. I will make an exchange with you. You see this flower ; it is not everybody I would give it to. It is yours if you will fix your pin in this rose-coloured ribbon.—You must do it."

Here she appeared really to fall asleep ; the conversation was broken off ; the position was no longer tenable.

The beauty lay gracefully reposing on the couch. George looked on her with the eye of an artist ; far from his pure heart was any other thought.

"It is Correggio's *Antiope*," he said to himself ; "what an admirable picture !"

And he looked at the beautiful pomegranate blossom, that lay on that sleeping bosom, and he looked at me, too, me poor little pin, and durst neither move a step nor speak a word.

Then it was that he saw a welcome and unexpected apparition rise up behind the couch. Have you seen, in a celebrated portrait by Ingres, a Muse, in the background of the picture, extending her arm over the pensive head of a great composer ? So rose Borghèse's tall form over the couch on which *Antiope* was sleeping. She made a sign to George, who stole softly away through the trees, well pleased at this unexpected *dénouement*.

Borghèse looked after him with a smile on her face, fixed a pin in the rose-coloured ribbon, cautiously withdrew the flower, and laying a kiss softly on the fair sleeper's cheek, disappeared on the other side of the garden.

Was *Antiope* asleep, or was she only drowsy ? *No one knows*. At all events a blush, as deep as that of the pomegranate blossom, instantly overspread her cheeks and her forehead. She opened her eyes, looked round her, and saw no one.

"Impertinent !" she exclaimed.

She looked at her girdle, and saw no flower there ; she looked at the ribbon, saw the pin—and covered her face with her hands.

Weep, noble lady, weep, since, in spite of your follies, you

still retain a sense of honour and duty. It is indolence then, ennui, selfishness, that tempt you to venture, at all risks, in quest of things new and strange? Do you not see around you miseries enough to relieve, tears enough to dry, good enough to do? You have only to open your hand to make wretches happy.

Do you not hear, through the thick walls and double hangings of your splendid saloons, the plaintive voice that appeals to you? Do those groans awake no echo in your heart? You forget the only real, pure happiness, and run after danger to kill time.

But it is nothing, you say, it is a pin, a flower, a hand that sometimes touches a hand.—And is it nothing to sully by your wiles the purity of a youth whom you ought to protect; to trouble by your enchantments the calm of a blameless conscience? And you yourself, how far do you intend to go? Do you think there is any stopping on such a downward path?

The hidden voice that spoke was the late awakened voice of conscience. Madame Wolff loved and respected her husband, who made her happy, and was like a fond father to her. In spite of all the inconsistencies in which she was sometimes involved by her Creole birth, her inexperience, her youth, and inconsiderate and enterprising character, she was really a well meaning and very faithful wife. Great, therefore, was her confusion at having been treated with so little respect. She felt that a secret was about to exist between her and George, and her indignation against him was very great. She returned pensively to her apartments, uncertain what course of conduct she should pursue.

CHAPTER XII.

MISFORTUNE.

GEORGE, on his part, was not satisfied with his day ; it seemed to him that he had neglected his duty in listening to that frivolous conversation. He recollected that he had barely time to keep an appointment with a celebrated artist.

In fact, he arrived too late ; the artist had gone to the Jardin des Plantes, where he was a professor.

The public gardens of Paris are certain plots of ground, where the civilised go in the hours of recreation to take the dust, not to breathe the fresh air. The Jardin des Plantes is a happy exception, and it has been too often described to make it necessary that we should dwell upon the mystery of its labyrinths, the grace of its rustic *châlets*, in which the animals are kept, the farmyard in which the fowls strut, the rich beds of flowers, and the majestic conservatories, in which the luxuriant vegetation of the tropics is developed.

Let us follow George, who passed by all these fine things to hasten to the building in which the celebrated professor delivered his course. What a strange and curious spectacle ! a scene to match the phantasies of a midsummer night's dream. A vast hall is lighted by a great number of high windows, and all along its walls are ranges of glass jars, in which the most deformed creatures, monstrous serpents, hideous toads, viscid cuttle fish, salamanders and fantastic dragons swim like preserved fruits.

If you look up to the ceiling, terrible creatures threaten you—crocodiles with long gaping jaws, alligators, boa constrictors twisted into spiral rings, great fishes armed

with a saw or a sword, colossal rays whose great mouths seem to gape with stupid laughter, spherical fishes looking like a huge football stuck all over with spikes ; and I know not what besides ; creatures that are seen nowhere else.

If you can overcome the terror or disgust inspired by all these hideous and ill preserved creatures, and look down upon the human beings in this hall of study, what an amusing and charming contrast !

At each table, facing a good light, is seated a young woman in the simple and unconstrained style of dress proper for working hours. Before her is a spray of flowers, or a flower painting, which she is copying. Everybody is steadily at work ; but half-smiles are exchanged, and conversation is carried on in whispers. These women and girls, their fresh flowers and fruits, and their intelligent and graceful work, form a very pleasing spectacle.

George entered this sanctuary timidly, and was about to address one of the attendants, when he saw coming out of the next room a short, thick-set man, whose face would have appeared very commonplace, but that his forehead and eyes denoted much intelligence and vivacity. "Flora's high priest was he, high priest, too, of Pomona." He had his two arms filled with great bunches of the rarest and freshest flowers, which he might have let the attendant carry, who followed him empty handed, but he liked to carry them himself, just as a father takes his darling child out of the nurse's arms to dandle it in his own. He was proud of his rich load, and walked round the room distributing the flowers according to the capacity of each pupil. This one had only a stalk of periwinkles, that one a bouquet of camellias ; all were satisfied.

The happy professor who ruled over this charming kingdom was the celebrated Redouté, whose inimitable and facile talent made an epoch in art by simplifying its processes, purifying taste, teaching how to see nature aright, extending the practice of an attractive department of painting, and bequeathing to his favourite pupils the secret of his magic pencil.* I say the happy professor, because he

* Among the ablest flower painters may be mentioned, Mesdames Chante-reine, Delaporte-Bessin, and d'Esmenard, who, in their limpid water-colour drawings, have preserved the pure tradition of Redouté, their master and their friend.

counted among his brightest days those which he spent among his pupils, surrounded by the three things he loved above all—art, flowers, and, if it must be told, the pretty persons who came of their own accord to group themselves round the flowers.

So when Redouté had given a short audience to George, and arranged with him about a picture which Baron Wolff was very desirous of having, he was good enough to take him round the hall, for he had recognised a connoisseur in George, and he liked to do the honours of his unequalled class.

“What a providential contrast!” he exclaimed, with a little touch of inflatedness which was natural to him when he spoke of his favourite subject.

He pointed to a narrow vase of elegant form, in which a splendid lily rose majestically amidst its spike of lanceolate leaves. A branch of clematis, issuing from the vase, shot up to the pure corolla to embrace it, and then turning upon itself, as if intoxicated by so much beauty and sweetness, it fell back exhausted, rolled in graceful spirals to the foot of the vase, and remained stretched along it. Redouté stood wrapt in contemplation before the sport of nature, in which the majestic beauty of the one flower and the light grace of the other were so happily displayed.

“How beautiful it is!” said he.

He gave some directions to the lady who had undertaken to reproduce this rare group, and passed on.

On another table he found a small urn containing a camellia, a rose, and a petunia, all of them of a pure white, enhanced by the dark leaf of the camellia. The flowers were always the first things he looked at.

“It is not easy,” said he.

Then leaning towards the artist,—

“Do you know the difference between velvet, silk, and gauze?”

“I should think so, Monsieur. Here is silk,” and she pointed to her dress; “here is velvet,” and she showed a ribbon.

“Well, you have made your three flowers of paper. Now the camellia is velvet, the rose is silk, and the petunia is gauze.”

And he was gone.

He sat down at another table, and the pupils rose on all sides to discover his secret.

"You have rosy fingers," said he, "and my big fingers are like those of a peasant of the Danube; yet you shall see."

He took up a brush, dipped it in clear water, just touched the palette, spread the brush on the white paper, and, *then*, there was seen springing to life, and developing itself as if by a miracle, a large shining cup of black velvet. There was a cry of admiration.

"It is no harder than that," said he.

And he passed on.

Before arriving at the next table, which was a little apart from the rest, he stopped and, laying his hand on George's arm, he pointed out to him, on the table, a double stalk of convolvulus, following freely the caprices of its nature, and made him admire its large blue, rose-coloured, and white blossoms. The arrowy leaves and the spiral convolutions were grouped in the happiest manner.

Then he made him observe that the incipient painting was proceeding in the best way, and had all the freshness of the original. And, lastly, he pointed, with an expressive sign, to the artist, who was absorbed in her work. He had found conjoined art, flowers, and beauty; and he stood and gazed on them.

The painter was leaning over her paper, too busy with her work to notice anything else.

"That is good painting," said Redouté, placing himself before her with George.

The young lady looked up, and then she perceived that, in the ardour of work, her simple toilette had become slightly disordered. A light black scarf which she wore on her neck had become unfastened, but the excessive heat of the day had prevented her from observing it before, and her shoulders and part of her bosom were uncovered. A deep blush instantly overspread her pallid face; she brought back the errant scarf to its place in extreme confusion, and looked about as if in search of something.

"Take care, you will spoil your painting!" cried the master. "You are looking for a pin; well, luckily, here is a gentleman who has one on his sleeve."

He took the pin from its place; George snatched it back,

and handed it to the young lady, saying, as he held it still for a moment between his fingers,—

“*Take care you do not lose it!*”

The young lady looked at him in surprise, and took the pin with a smile.

If the young artist had been only pretty, George would perhaps not have remarked her, thanks to his grave character and his habitual abstraction. But his attention was riveted by one of those chances which rarely occur except in romances.

The radiant forehead, the finely-marked brows, the velvet softness of the eyes, beneath their long black lashes, the transparent truthfulness of the face, and its melancholy expression, all recalled to his mind a beloved image, the same that had consoled and sustained him in his hours of despondency. Imagination had doubtless added its prestige to the fortuitous resemblance; but for him it was the living original of Correggio's *Misfortune* that blushed and breathed before him.

Nothing of the picture was wanting, neither the pale star on the forehead, figured by a wild rose which a friend had stealthily fixed in her hair, nor the black scarf floating on her white shoulders, nor the bouquet of large scabious, which Redouté, with a touching analogy, had laid on her table when he made his distribution of flowers.

Her hair, blacker than ebony, was gathered with an easy negligence into a thick twist, breaking into luxuriant curls that fell in spirals on her graceful neck. And there again a singularity attracted the eye, and fixed the gazer's thoughts. A tress of white hair, like a fine thread of quicksilver trickling over a ground of jet, seemed as it were the seal of affliction impressed on the maiden's head.

Misfortune! what an alluring mirage, what an inexplicable treasure for a pure-hearted man to light upon!

George seemed rooted to the spot, till Redouté, after complimenting and encouraging his pupil, took him by the arm and led him to the door, still turning to look back on what he was leaving behind him.

CHAPTER XIII.

DEPARTURE.

GEORGE hastened to resume his work, which had suffered a little by his absence. In the evening the ladies were in the drawing-room, conversing on the events of the day.

"What of our wager?" said the English lady

"I have lost," said Madame Wolff, blushing; "I was too confident. Here are your twenty louis, my dear lady; the poor will be no losers by their changing hands; and I confess myself beaten."

Madame Wolff kept in the shade, looking very thoughtful and alleging she was unwell. M. Wolff appeared excited and uneasy, and every look of his seemed to his wife to be a reproach.

The English lady chatted in another part of the room with her fair friends.

"Have you guessed the secret of our dear baroness's emotion? I believe she is too modest. I will give her back her money, for she has certainly won it. Only I am afraid that her victory has cost her dearer than she expected."

"What do you mean?" cried the feminine audience in chorus, with eager curiosity.

"Why, do you not observe M. George's radiant air? Now look at his sleeve; you will see no pin there, and you never will again; but it is not lost for everybody, perhaps."

"Is it true," said a young lady going up to George, "that

you have given up wearing that pin, that was never to leave you?"

"I have lost it," said George, smiling; "the charm is broken; I am now without defence against misfortune."

"George," said M. Wolff, in a loud voice (he knew nothing of these frivolous conversations, and seemed to be intently reading some papers), "you must go abroad instantly. You have a passport; you will have it *viséd* at Havre. The American packet sails to-morrow. The matter is serious; come with me."

These words, uttered in the short, decided tone which was habitual with M. Wolff, and this abrupt departure, caused some sensation in the drawing-room. As for Madame Wolff she could no longer suppress her emotion, and as her conscience made her attribute to the events of the day, what was perhaps only the effect of chance and the urgency of business, she swooned on the sofa where she was resting.

"I told you so," whispered the English lady.

Everybody hastened to the aid of the invalid, and Borghèse, always kind and helpful, led her to her chamber.

"My dear boy," said M. Wolff, when he was closeted with George, "you alone can save us. You speak English like a native; you are young, active, and intelligent; go without a moment's loss of time. The house of Jackson, of Quebec, which was giving us serious uneasiness, is about to stop payment. I have had sure and confidential intimation of the fact. All is not lost however. If we arrive in time, we have them fast. I have little to explain to you; the business is known to you; look over the papers; here are our proofs. This pocket-book contains the funds to defray your travelling expenses. I give you *carte blanche*. If you succeed, it is the beginning of your fortune, for you must think of yourself also. You shall have ten per cent. on the amount recovered, which will be considerable; and do not be too easy with them, they can pay. Here is a letter for the consul, who will support you if necessary. You have my power of attorney, and here is my signature in blank for a receipt to any amount."

After giving him some further particulars, he embraced him, wishing him success, and bidding him write as soon as he arrived at New York, and before he left for Quebec

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VOYAGE.

GEORGE had nothing to reproach himself with ; he was calm and full of confidence. A voyage to New York was a good fortune for him who knew so well how to *see*. The distance was of no importance to him, the passage being so rapid, nor did the idea of danger cross his mind, his desire to be useful and to respond to an honourable confidence gave him such force.

He embarked next day, at Havre, on board a splendid steamer, and had a pleasant and quick passage, during which he did not give himself up to the *far niente* into which passengers often fall, and which makes the time seem doubly tedious.

He kept a journal, noted down a multitude of observations, admired the transformations which the sea underwent under the varying state of the atmosphere, sometimes dark, sometimes luminous, golden, phosphorescent ; he watched the wake of the ship, and calculated the power of the machines which, in calm weather, traced upon the wave a line as straight and sure as a railway. He conversed with the engineers and the officers, went on deck to admire a brilliant sunset, or a fine starlight night, and abandoned himself to his reveries, in which there sometimes presented itself the image of her who wore a white flower for a star on her forehead, and whom he had not forgotten.

At New York he received letters of introduction from some friends, wrote to Europe, and advanced into the interior. His thoughts then ran wholly on the success of his journey, and he arrived at Quebec indifferent enough as to the nature of the country he traversed.

CHAPTER XV.

DIPLOMACY.

THE day after his arrival, George repaired at an early hour to the country house of Jackson and Co. He had secured the aid of a lawyer, to whom he had a letter of introduction.

"Gentlemen," he said, in good English, "I present myself under the auspices of common friends in New York, whose letter I hand you." (In commercial language, correspondents are called friends). "I have received large shipments from England, and I require bills on Liverpool or Manchester, for which I will give value here."

The partners exchanged looks.

"The value in cash? Very good, Sir; and what amount of bills do you require?"

"Well, some forty or fifty thousand dollars."

After consulting together the partners replied:

"We can furnish fifty thousand dollars at eight days' sight on Davidson, the first house in Manchester, which owes us more than that sum."

"Very well, gentlemen," said George; "have the goodness to prepare bills to that amount, in several sets, to my order. Meanwhile I will go and procure cash."

Terms were then arranged, and George withdrew.

Presently he came back with his lawyer, and thus addressed the partners:

"Gentlemen, you have just declared to me that the house of Davidson owed you fifty thousand dollars, and that

you were ready to supply me with bills to that amount for cash."

"That was the arrangement, Sir."

"And you are not aware of any opposition affecting the sum in question, which would nullify in my hands the bills you propose to sell me?"

"What do you mean, Sir? Do you suppose——"

"I suppose nothing, gentlemen; but here is an opposition on the part of the house of Wolff, of Paris, which has been duly notified to you, and which prohibits Davidson from making any payment on your account. Here again are the detailed accounts of the house of Wolff, to which you have long been indebted to the amount of forty-nine thousand, seven hundred, and seventy five dollars, with interest. This gentleman will tell you what serious consequences might result for you, if, after declaring that the sum was at your command in Manchester, you refused to accept M. Wolff's receipt in exchange for the bills on Davidson.

The lawyer demonstrated with professional coolness that it would be a very serious matter for Messrs. Jackson and Co., since the facts of the case could be distinctly proved by witnesses. The bills were drawn in favour of George. The opposition which had been notified to them rendered these bills of no value to any but the house of Wolff, which alone could withdraw the opposition, and consequently the bills were *fraudulent*; the case was flagrant.

The partners tried at first to argue the matter, but presently, to avoid an exposure which would hasten their ruin, they made up their minds with the prompt decision of the American character, and accepted M. Wolff's receipt in payment of first and second of exchange drawn in favour of the house of Wolff on Davidson of Manchester. Thereupon George wished them good morning, and went away perfectly at ease as to his full success in that difficult negotiation.

Davidson was an old clerk of M. Wolff's, who had become his friend. Being established in Manchester, he had made M. Wolff aware of the desperate condition of the house of Jackson and Co., and of the only means by which he could secure payment of their debt to him.

George immediately remitted the *first* of the duplicate sets

of bills to M. Wolff, with a full assurance that they would be paid at sight, and retained the others in his own hands as a security against any mischance. Everything turned out just as he had expected, and George, who, in spite of his simplicity, was already an able man of business, could enjoy the satisfaction which an honest man may most righteously derive from the thought that he has deceived a deceiver.

Some days afterwards Jackson and Co. were declared bankrupts, and but for George's promptitude all would have been lost.

After business, pleasure. George had still an excursion to make in Canada, to visit his correspondents in Montreal, Kingston, Toronto, and other towns that spring up as if by enchantment on that vigorous soil. In Lower Canada he found himself in a country which still preserved the memory of its French origin, and the religion and manners of France. The fertile rural districts, covered with the most abundant crops, and by long ranges of apple orchards, reminded him of the finest parts of Normandy. In every village the taper spires of the Catholic churches and the hallowed sound of their bells strengthened the illusion and touched him deeply. He often entered those rustic temples to put up a prayer for his mother, and, perhaps, for an unknown friend. He traversed the great lakes in those floating towns which are the packetboats of America, and shot the rapids with the intrepidity of the Americans, to whom danger is nothing and time is everything.

He had read Chateaubriand, who has described those regions with the prestige of his talent, but with rather too much grandiloquence, and he found the country greatly changed.

Where Chateaubriand saw huts of savages and half-naked women rocking their children to sleep in hammocks made of creeping plants, he saw a sumptuous town, traversed by iron railways, and provided with all the comforts of Europe, with its fashions, its journals, its pianos, and its oddities.

In Montreal fair ladies obtain their fashions and their nicknackeries from Paris. In so new a country, in which the arts are still in their infancy, for they come last of all, he was greatly astonished at finding himself shown

into the establishment of a picture seller. Alas ! what he saw there was enough to give an amateur the horrors. Coloured lithographs, glaring and gaudy, made his eyes ache ; and the pictorial ventures which Europe had shipped off to those latitudes were not of a nature to give the Canadians a high idea of the artists of France.

He noticed, however, with interest, the conscientious studies of some young painters of the country, and could foresee that art would become developed in its turn, and spread its noble boughs over that fruitful land which industry had already transformed.

The dealer told George that several ladies, who had visited France, had brought flower painting into fashion, and that he found it impossible to supply them with suitable examples to copy ; he had nothing but a collection of old engravings of the Rue Saint Jacques. George entered into a contract with him for the execution and prompt transmission of a dozen bouquets of flowers from nature, and he could not help thinking that this chance might perhaps be of service to some artist who might not so easily find employment for his talent in France.

Having finished his business he returned to New York ; and after again employing his time for M. Wolff's best interests, he took his passage in the first packet bound for Havre. A fortnight afterwards he was once more in the mansion in the Chaussée d'Antin.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ORDER.

“COMPLETE success !” cried M. Wolff, the moment he saw him ; “the money is here, and your share is well earned.”

Then handing him a pocket-book which contained not less than thirty-five bank notes, he embraced him cordially.

“You are a clever negotiator,” he said, “and it was time. Eight days later the funds in Davidson’s hands would have belonged to the bankrupt’s estate, and it would have been out of our friend’s power to reserve them for us. You must now rest a while, you have need of a holiday. Some arrears of work would have accumulated in your absence, but we took temporary measures to prevent it. I don’t want to see you for a week.”

“Then I will go and see my mother, from whom I have been so long absent,” said George.

And having warmly expressed his gratitude to M. Wolff, he went away with a light heart.

What reader can be at all in doubt as to the direction in which our young traveller was forthwith rolling along upon glowing wheels ? He was in the Jardin des Plantes at the hour when the pupils in painting were assembled in class, and it was not without turning pale that he saw at the first glance that the only place which interested him was vacant. He summoned up courage enough to speak to Redouté, who loved a joke, and said to him, with a laugh, “I rather think it is not on M. Wolff’s behalf you are come to-day ;” and he took him into his private room.

"To speak seriously," said George, producing a paper from his pocketbook, "here is an order I obtained abroad. It appears to me unworthy of your talents, Monsieur, but perhaps it would suit your pupils ; and I confess that on comparing together the works which you were good enough to let me see the other day, the free bold style of the person who is absent to-day appeared to me more satisfactory than any other. May I venture to ask your opinion ?"

Redouté read the memorandum and replied :—

"You have given proof of good taste and discernment, and I will add that never will an order have fallen into fitter hands. You will see two sisters worthy of all respect. They were recommended to me by friends, and I should be very glad if the advice you ask of me could be of service to them."

There was another question George wanted to ask, but his courage failed him.

"You would like, I suppose, to know where these ladies live," said Redouté, slyly. "I only know that they belong to Saint Germain, and that they are the Demoiselles Duval. The one you have seen is the younger, and her name, I believe, is Mademoiselle Jeanne. Try to do them this service ; it is Providence, perhaps, who sends you, for they have not been prosperous. *I have no other requests to make of you.*"

George bowed, with a look of gratitude which responded to Redouté's meaning.

Next day, without any other clue, George set off for the little district in which he had good hopes of discovering the Demoiselles Duval, who, in all probability, gave lessons in painting.

If France is the most beautiful country in the world, Saint Germain is, perhaps, the loveliest spot in France. A castle redolent of the noblest details of French history, a high table-land stretching away out of sight, and whence the delighted eye discovers, in the foreground, vineyards sloping gently down to meadows washed by the Seine ; beyond them, a long reach of the winding river, studded with verdant isles ; then on the other side of the water, more meadows, more woods, and villages scattered over the vast plain, and half concealed in the shade or sparkling in a gleam of sunshine ; and beyond these again, the back-

ground of the wide diorama, the city, the great city, with its colossal triumphal arch visible in clear weather on the verge of the horizon.

On the right the rounded heights of Luciennes and Marly descend in the form of an amphitheatre. On the left a vast forest looks like the private park of the fortunate inhabitants of the privileged little town.

Every beauty was heightened in George's eyes by the feelings and the vague hopes that possessed him. Unmerited misfortune is a thing so sacred, that George cherished the belief that he should meet with persons quite worthy of the interest with which Jeanne's open countenance and Redouté's few words had inspired him.

It was not, however, without some anxiety that he stepped into the church, at the entrance of the town, to ask God's blessing on his honest purpose.

If the cathedrals of the great cities derive an imposing effect on high days from their magnificent proportions, their sumptuous decorations, their splendid illumination and rich music, the little church of Saint Germain gains, perhaps, by being visited in solitude and silence by the pious votary. Its dim religious light is favourable to devout meditation.

The church was almost empty. George touched his face with holy water, and stationed himself near a chapel of the Virgin. He had been there for some time, giving thanks for the protection which Providence had vouchsafed him, when he saw two young ladies pass by him and move slowly towards the door. Passing easily before them, he dipped his finger in the font and held it out to Jeanne, who extending her own hand to meet it, raised her eyes to his with an expressive look, and, leaning on her sister's arm, said to George,—

"I have it still."

And she pointed with her finger to me, poor little pin, who was holding her scarf in its place.

The sister appeared unable to understand this fragment of conversation. All three left the church together. The position would have been embarrassing for many people, but simplicity and uprightness make everything easy and natural.

"Mademoiselle," said George, as they were leaving the church, "allow me to profit by this meeting, which I have,

perhaps, asked of God *in this church* (he laid an emphasis on the last three words), to make a proposal to you with respect to your works, upon the recommendation of M. Redouté."

"Sir," said Jeanne, "if you present yourself *in this place* in the name of Providence and in that of our beloved master, you are welcome."

The two sisters moved on, and George walked respectfully near them. The elder sister whispered to the younger:—

"Will you tell me, Jeanne, what is the meaning of this encounter? How did you come to know this young man? Where have you seen him? It seems you have secrets you keep from me."

"I will tell you everything, dear sister; do not be at all alarmed. I do not know him, and I answer for him almost. Have we not our understanding, and our mother's memory to guide us, almost as if she were still with us? Let me just speak to him."

They were crossing the *place* before the castle, and were soon in the parterre.

"You have never been in this neighbourhood before?" said Jeanne.

"Never, Mademoiselle. I have much to do and little time at my own disposal; but what I see here, this magnificent scenery, the pure air, the fine forest, all this strikes me as admirable, and one cannot press this flowery turf without wishing to return to the spot, and perhaps to settle down in it for ever."

"That is indeed what our friends tell us. But in spite of your busy occupations, you perhaps amuse yourself with painting? And you know M. Redouté?"

"Very little, Mademoiselle; I have been in communication with him about an order for a picture, and as I now require a certain number of flower pieces, and noticed your work the first time I had the honour of meeting you, I thought that perhaps you might be willing to undertake the matter."

"He is a picture dealer then?" said the elder sister.

"I cannot tell," replied Jeanne, moving a little away from George; "but you see plainly that this young man is very sedate and well-bred; he cannot have come here with bad intentions."

She then renewed her conversation with George, in hopes to learn something of him from his language and his countenance, before he entered her home.

"I did not very well understand the caution you gave me, when you lent me a pin, but it seemed as if you rather grudged it me," she said, laughing. "However I have preserved it very carefully, for, to tell you the truth, I had a presentiment that one day or other this precious trust would be reclaimed from me, and you see that I was not mistaken."

"Well, Mademoiselle, though I have very special reasons for prizing this poor little pin, I can give you longer credit; but it is on weightier affairs we have to treat to-day."

"You know me then? Some common friends have spoken of us."

"At least, Mademoiselle, your features were not unknown to me, and I believe I should have recognised you among a thousand."

"And is it your pin that has enabled you to make this grand discovery?" she asked with a smile.

"Perhaps, for it was in presenting it to you, that I recognised in your eyes an image that awakened sad recollections in my mind."

"I believe, Sir, we had better talk of painting. I give you warning that I am very unyielding in matters of business.—But one word more, pray; what is that story, Sir, of an image, which you talk of as if it were my description in a hue and cry, kept by you that you might arrest me should I happen to come in your way? This is rather alarming, and I like rigidly veracious people."

George silently opened his pocket-book, and showed the page containing the sketch made in Munich.

"You see that we are already old acquaintances," he said, in a low voice.

The two sisters were deeply astonished at seeing that striking likeness, which bore a date already remote, and corroborated by the appearance of the paper and the pencil marks. But they resolved to act warily.

They arrived at a small house near the parterre and on the extreme verge of the forest, the front of which was adorned with rose trees that had climbed up to the very roof. The ground-floor was occupied by Madame Blanche-

main, the owner of the house, who was a friend and a protectress to the two sisters. Their little rooms were on the floor above.

"My dear Madame Blanchemain," said Jeanne, who entered first, "here is a gentleman who wishes to see our paintings. Will you have the goodness to receive him. We are going to look for some specimens, to save him trouble."

And the sisters went up stairs.

"Please, have the goodness to sit down, Sir," said Dame Blanchemain. "Uncommon fine weather it is to-day, but rather warm; we shall have a storm, I'm thinking. But that will do no harm; it is good for the vines, and it is time we had a good year; it is badly wanted. I have a little bit of a vineyard out by Mareil which is coming on capitally, and the wine is not bad; it is not first rate, but it is pretty fair, and one can drink it with water. It is a wine that bears water very well.—Would Monsieur like to refresh himself?"

George made a sign declining the hospitable offer. Madame Blanchemain went on without a pause:—

"Sure enough, you will be satisfied with the work of these ladies, if it is for trade, or for lessons, or what not. We always say these ladies, it is a way we have, but by rights it is these *young* ladies. Oh, yes, God knows, and good and proper, and well-behaved, and all that, and always contented, and with what? With nothing. And to be sure good reason they have to be contented, the poor angels, for they are content with themselves; but you must say nothing, I hear them coming down. I'll tell you all about it.—Do you want much of their work? for they have a deal on hand; always working, that's the way with them. But trade ain't very brisk at this season.—How do you find it? Does it keep moving a bit?—And the pretty flowers that Jeanne makes, the handy little dear! But you are going to see all that. Don't say a word."

It would not have been easy for George to say anything whilst Dame Blanchemain's tongue was never still a moment.

The two sisters came in with portfolios and spread out their goods. Dame Blanchemain sat near the window, Jeanne stood at a large table covered with her works, and

George was seated on the other side as a buyer. To judge from the scene that ensued, Jeanne had been perhaps too boastful when she gave herself out for a clever woman of business.

"Anna," she said to her sister, "why did you bring down this portfolio? You know I am not satisfied with it. There is nothing in it worth showing."

George, on the contrary, eagerly examined the contents, and thought them all charming.

"What freshness of tone!" he exclaimed. "It is as if one was walking in a blooming garden."

"They are only rough sketches," said Jeanne. "I must paint this wreath of roses over again. It is too flat."

"Don't do so," said George, "it could not be better."

"Why, it seems to me that you have exchanged parts," said Anna. "Monsieur is the buyer; it is for him to find fault, whilst you ought to cry up the worth of what you have for sale."

"True," said Jeanne; "let us begin again."

Thereupon, checking a half smile, she went on, with great gravity:—

"Monsieur, here are some very pretty paintings; we have a very complete assortment of them. Would Monsieur allow me to put up a few for him?"

Then turning to her sister,—

"That is the way, I believe?"

"Pretty well," said Anna.

"Well," replied George, imitating her air of business, "since you have nothing better to show me just now, I will take this bunch of daisies, and this sheaf of corn flowers and wild poppies, if you can meet me in the price."

"I pledge you my word, Sir, I could not do them for you under——"

Here she turned in great perplexity to her sister.

"Go on," said Anna, "you do it very well, quite like a real shopkeeper."

"Well, then—it is out of my power, Sir, to say less for these than twenty-five francs a piece, fifty francs the pair; but you must come and see us again."

"How she understands dealing!" exclaimed Dame Blanchemain, sniffing delicately at a pinch of snuff;

"she sells them as well as she does them. She is clever at everything."

"Twenty-five francs !" said George, with a dissatisfied air ; "I could not think of paying that price for such paintings."

"Still and all," said Dame Blanchemain, putting in her word, "there's no good in haggling about the like of that when a body's a judge. Hard enough they have earned it, the poor demoiselles ! You must not begrudge them their poor five-and-twenty francs. If you only knew at what o'clock they get up to work ; but it's like you'll never know it, and for why ? because while you are all snug still in your beds in Paris, they have knocked off a lot of work already. Howsomever, if a body ain't a judge——"

The two sisters had tried in vain to interrupt this flux of words ; at last, said Jeanne, taking the old lady gently by the arm,—

"My dear Madame Blanchemain, let Monsieur make his own bargain, he will give us what he pleases."

"Mademoiselle," said George, "I cannot think of paying for bouquets like those less than fifty francs a piece, or a hundred francs a pair. If I order a dozen, you will, perhaps, be able to let me have them at that price."

"But you make a mistake, Sir," said Jeanne, after a minute's reflection, "you offer me double what I ask."

"It is the price fixed by my principal," said George, "and I cannot change it. This transaction will, perhaps, lead to others, so I advise you to accept it."

"That's what you may call a pleasant way of doing business !" cried Dame Blanchemain. "After that I have not a word to say against Monsieur, but sore and sorry it made me to see him beat down the price that way, but now I see that he is a connoisseur. It was only his fun. But it is not a morsel too dear. They're worth at the lowest penny fifty francs, so they are, paintings like them. If Monsieur would please to take some refreshment. You see, Monsieur——"

She tried to recollect the name, but not finding it in her memory, for a good reason, she went on :—

"These young ladies would give everything for nothing, that's what they would, they are so disinterested ! Now that it's a bargain, I must tell you that they don't know

how to stand up for their rights, and if there were not honest people like you, they'd let everything go for nothing, and that's God's truth."

"Sir," said Anna, who held something of a mother's position in the household, "we take all you have said to my sister for earnest, since you have come to us under the sanction of so honourable a name; but we have not the honour of knowing you——"

"Mademoiselle," replied George, anticipating the question she was about to ask, "here is my correspondent's order. I hope it will be followed by others. You see that the prices fixed do not allow me to pay less than what I have offered you. If you please, I will put into Madame's hands the price of the two subjects I have chosen."

And he counted five pieces of gold into the hand of Dame Blanchemain, who received them with great glee. It would perhaps have been a trying thing for him to put them into Jeanne's hand.

"Let's have it," cried Dame Blanchemain. "It will find its use in the housekeeping, won't it, Mesdemoiselles? Short reckonings are best among friends; and so——"

George broke in upon the good dame's discourse, knowing that it was his only chance of getting a hearing.

"As for the ten other designs, I leave the choice of subjects and composition to you, provided they are of the same size, and all from nature. Here, Madam, is my name, with the address of the banking-house, that will pay for the ten designs, which are impatiently expected."

"But," said Jeanne, looking at her sister, "it will take a long time, ten bouquets; we must look about for fine flowers and choose them carefully. I don't think I can do more than one a week. Perhaps Monsieur would like to see my work now and then; for I might make mistakes, and it would be well to have them set right in time."

Anna made no answer, and there was a moment's silence.

"If you will permit me," said George, "I will come occasionally to look at this beautiful country, and see how you are getting on."

"There is another question, Monsieur George," said Jeanne, "which I should like to ask you."

George bowed.

"I should like to know, if I may be allowed, how you came by that pencil sketch which one would almost take for my portrait, except that I do not always look so sad."

"Do sit down," said Madame Blanchemain, "and tell us all about it. Jeanne, do you see, is like that peasant woman of Fourqueux; you remember, Mesdemoiselles? You must know we were out there taking a walk, and these young ladies must always be doing something; so down we sat under some apple trees, and Mademoiselle Anna takes up her album and begins to draw a paltry cabin, with a pigeon-house, and ivy, you know, all of no account at all. Well, behold you, up comes a fury of a woman, and maybe she did not give us the rough edge of her tongue! And then she wanted to make us pay smart money for having copied her cabin, under pretence that we were English. Lord, how we laughed, did not we, Anna? And so, as I was saying, maybe Jeanne does not like to have her picture drawn without her leave——"

George thought it time to interrupt the good dame. He told the story of his life in a few words, and stated simply under what circumstances he had seen the picture in Munich. Jeanne appeared pensive, Anna was afraid of letting her sister form new acquaintances, and Madame Blanchemain was left to sustain the conversation.

Seeing the reserve of the young ladies, George felt it was time for him to take his leave.

"Mademoiselle," he said to Anna, "we have made a bargain——"

And he held out his hand; Anna gave him hers with hesitation.

"Oh, well, for my part," said Madame Blanchemain, "I don't give my white hand" (this was one of her jokes), "but I must embrace you, for it was the good God that sent you here, and it was time, that it was."

George embraced Madame Blanchemain bravely, and bowed to the young ladies, his last look meeting the calm and stedfast look of Jeanne.

The day was fine, and George was in no haste to return. He strolled into the heart of the forest to collect his thoughts and con over the events of the morning.

Everything appeared to him discreet, interesting, correct. Honest Dame Blanchemain's homely familiarity did not seem

to him ridiculous, for he perceived that the good soul was a friend, a confidant, a guardian, and almost a family to the orphans. He comprehended, too, that Jeanne had put herself under God's protection before she touched his hand in the church.

He duly estimated the prudence with which Jeanne questioned him on the way before she admitted him into the house in which she lived, and he fairly conjectured all her sister's uneasiness.

He approved of their reserve in not receiving him in their own room on his first visit, but putting themselves under the protection of Madame Blanchemain; nor had he failed to gather from the good dame's prattle that they had suffered, and that the help he had brought them could not arrive more *à propos*.

Lastly, if he was satisfied with the excellent designs they had showed him, he was still more charmed with Jeanne's frank and open nature, and with the kindly air of her sister, who watched over her like a mother. He was delighted then with his day, and after roaming about the sombre forest, resting on the tufted and odorous grass, and inhaled with all the power of his lungs the racy exhalations of the mighty oaks, he returned with a light heart to Paris.

Jeanne, Anna, and Madame Blanchemain remained sitting in the little parlour on the ground floor.

"Well, Jeanne," said Anna, "we are in for it. What did we promise our poor mother? That a stranger should never enter our house without being introduced to us by the friends she has left us. And you yourself told him to come again; I heard you."

"Don't be at all afraid, my dear sister," said Jeanne. "You saw how I took care to make him talk; we know him now. And besides, I had seen him before."

"You did not tell me so!" replied Anna, a little tartly.

Jeanne blushed a little, and told, in a very commonplace manner, the story of the pin she had promised to keep.

"It is very well to be prudent, my dears," said Madame Blanchemain, "and, God be thanked! you have nothing to reproach yourselves with on that score, or on any other, for the matter of that. But if you want to sell your pictures, and have spent all your money in Paris in learning how to paint them, you can't shut your door after all against

customers. You must be reasonable, Anna. Am I not here to guard you, since you must be put to nurse again? And then there is a thing you always forget, my poor dears, and that is, that you want money. You never complain, you are always good humoured; but I know well how you live; aye, aye, I know it well."

And with the back of her stout hand she wiped one of her eyes, which always wept more readily than the other.

"Well, here is money that is fairly yours, for you have bravely earned it."

And she chinked the five gold pieces in her hand.

"Here, housekeeper, take this," she said to Anna, "and don't be too thrifty with it, for the hand of Providence is in the matter, and there is five times as much coming to you. Embrace me now, and take away all these paintings, for I am going to get my bit of dinner, and it would be a pity to soil them."

The young ladies kissed her, thanked her for her kindness, and went back to their own rooms, happier and more hopeful.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MOTHER.

GEORGE only passed through Paris, and hastened to spend his few holidays with his mother, whom he had not seen for some years.

She was living in a little town in Normandy, and was spending, in peacefulness and prayer, the last years of a courageous life which had sustained the severest trials.

After providing by her own unassisted energy for the establishment of her numerous family, she had felt a need of retirement. Her daughters, who were married and settled in neighbouring towns, often came to keep her company in the fine season, and an unexpected bequest enabled her to enjoy in her old age a freedom from care and penury which she had not known in former days.

George found her alone. He had left home very young, and had returned to it only at rare intervals. Necessity, that sage counsellor, had given him a precocious maturity, and it was as a man that he now entered his mother's dwelling. The old servant-woman who had reared him was still there, overjoyed to announce his return.

The house was cheerful and pleasantly situated. Everything within it was redolent of quiet, order, good management and simplicity. He found his mother kneeling at her *prie-Dieu*, and helped her to rise, for she was aged and weak. But at her advanced age her features retained the nobleness and dignity that were the expression of her soul. She welcomed him with an overflowing heart.

"I was thinking of you, my dear son, and was thanking

God for having blessed my old age by giving me such consolations after the troubles of my life. Left wholly to yourself, you have committed no faults; your religious feelings and your filial piety have led you in the right path. How often have I regretted that I could not spend my last days with you; but I feel that I am growing too old to form new plans; my destiny is to remain here, where your sisters treat me with the kindest care. Your letters do me good and are a further help to me to live. M. Wolff himself has written to tell me how glad he was to have you with him. Blessings on you, my son, for having gladdened your mother's last days."

"Dear mother," said George, "it is a hard law of nature that disperses families. I ought always to have remained with you, to repay you by my love and incessant attention for the cares, and sufferings, and sacrifices of your past life. Do you remember that table round which the whole family, great and small, used to sit? With what fond respect your kind and judicious words were hearkened to! All are gone. Some are in another world, others are living far away, and now we shall be but two to-day at the great family table, and when I am gone, you will be left alone with your souvenirs."

"There is nothing painful, my dear child, in the souvenirs of a well filled life, as you will know one day. I am like the weary traveller, who, when he is come nearly to the end of his journey, stops and rests, and recalls to mind the dangers of the road, before he enters the city that is to be his refuge. But to-day I will think only of seeing you and conversing with you. How many things you have to tell me of your travels and your projects!"

Such was the tenour of the conversations between the pious mother, who awaited nothing now but the will of God, and the son who was beginning his career with faith and courage. Leaning on his arm, she ventured upon little promenades in the neighbourhood of the little town, and was proud of the good sense, rectitude, and acquirements of her George.

One day when she found him more meditative than usual (a mother divines everything), she said to him,—

"You have told me of your past life, my dear George, but

you say nothing of your projects for the future. You work much; you are not fond of gay society; you have an honourable position, and you have even laid by money, thanks to the liberality of M. Wolff, who, I know, wishes to attach you to him wholly. By-and-bye you will want a good wife, a pious one, that the blessing of Heaven may rest upon your home; modest and simple, that your happiness may be found by your own fireside and not abroad, and courageous, too, for you must both be ready for days of trial. I do not ask that she should be a beauty, but I should wish that she were pleasing, so that she should not suffer in your mind by comparison. I do not desire that she should be learned, but I would have her blest with a taste for whatever is good and lovely. I do not insist upon her being rich, though that would do no harm, but I should like her to possess some accomplishment which should be a recreation to her in prosperity and a resource in adversity."

"My dear mother," said George, greatly moved, "how is it that every word that issues from your lips, is like one out of the depths of my own heart? How is it that the wife you desire for me, is the same that I yearn to have for my life's companion? It is because I have lived through your life, been fed upon your saintly words, and have learned from you to love what is good and beautiful and true. I value wealth for as much as it may serve to make others happy, but I think it is to my own exertions I should look for it, and not to her whose support and guardian angel I desire to become. You have read my soul, as you used to do when I was a child, and when, only by looking in my face, you could so surely tell me my most secret thoughts. Yes, you have said truly. Your life is now calm and you have no longer need of my aid; but an instinct of my nature urges me to be useful to others. I sometimes ask myself what is the good of my toil if it does not profit some person who looks to it for support; of what use is my life, if I live only for myself."

"My dear son, when one is fond of dwelling on such reflections, which sometimes have their danger, one is very near finding her whom Providence designs for him, and perhaps he has even already met her."

"Am I still your little child, dear mother, and is it in my

face that you have read my secret, of which I will have no other confidant than my mother's heart?"

"George, my son," said the mother, after listening to the account of his encounter at the Jardin des Plantes and his journey to Saint Germain, "you have for many things the reason and the experience of a man; but your good heart might possibly lead you to do things which you would have cause to deplore. What you have told me of the home of these two young persons is certainly interesting and honourable. You have heard a good report of them from a person who knows them indirectly; but you yourself know neither them, nor their connections, nor their family, nor the cause of their misfortune. Understand, my dear, that in saying this I am not declaring myself opposed to your choice; you will not leave this place without having my consent and my blessing for yourself and for her whom you prefer, and whose image was engraved in your mind even before her person was known to you; but take care of that mirage of your imagination. I entreat you to maintain a prudent reserve for some time. Promise nothing; observe; keep your secret in your heart; be of service to her to whom you wish to devote your life; but above all be prudent; preserve your dignity and independence; and if after a year's trial your judgment remains unaltered, then make her your wife, and you will have fulfilled all my desires. Meanwhile, here is my consent, my dear son; it was prepared beforehand, for I was unwilling that any accident or illness should be a hindrance to your wishes."

So saying she took out from a secretary an envelope containing her signature in blank. George also found in it some banknotes for a thousand francs.

"They are yours, by all means yours, my dear. They are your savings which you sent me in difficult times, and better fortune has enabled me to put them by for you."

At George's earnest entreaty his mother consented to keep the money.

"But," she said, "I give it to your dear Jeanne to set her up when she begins housekeeping. You shall be her treasurer. Now I have done. You see I give you for marriage portion only a mother's counsel. But remember that, if circumstances require it, you may marry to-morrow,

and that, presented by you, your wife will be received here as my child."

George promised his mother that he would act circum-spectly, and after spending some days with her and his sisters who had come to meet him, he returned, full of joy and hope, to Paris.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALREADY ?

THE eight days granted by M. Wolff were not expired. George had spent his holiday in satisfying the dearest inclinations of his heart ; he had found a purpose and an end to live for. He would not let a day pass without disclosing his new feelings to his mother. Will he now go back to his benefactor and strenuously resume, before the appointed interval has expired, an occupation which will henceforth have a new stimulus ? We thought so at first.

Why then do we find him next day wandering about the verge of the forest of Saint Germain, among those first groups of fine timber trees and hawthorn whence the little house is visible, with its vines and the rose-trees clothing its front to the roof with verdure and flowers ? Why ? Does he know himself why ?

As the particle of gold silently but surely joins the vein ; as the drop of dew inevitably trickles to the limpid rill ; as the needle aspires eternally to the pole, so does the heart seek friendship, the strong man before God seek the weak, the true man seek the truth, so does the wicked man, alas ! recognise his like by certain signs and join company with him. All is mutual attraction and interconnection, and man, who thinks he acts of his own will, is led unfailingly to good if he hearkens to the voice of conscience and duty, to evil if he hearkens to his egotism and his evil passions.

Thus it was that golden-hearted George, resting in the shade of the greenwood in the most beautiful country of the world, gazed through the trees on the little white house, and said to himself, "Work and pray, poor dears, I guard you, with God's leave and my mother's."

He believed, however, the sage George, that the sight of the white house would suffice him, and that he would go back courageously to Paris, taking with him for a token a briar rose that hung towards him, like that which Jeanne wore in her hair the first time she met his view.

How comes it then, George, that you are seated in the little parlour, *tête-à-tête* with Madame Blanchemain, gravely discoursing with her upon the best and wholesomest food for canary birds? You are playing the truant, my lad, and you do not yourself know how you got in here.

You returned from the forest by the parterre in order to pass so much the nearer to the white house. The door was open, Madame Blanchemain was sitting at it; you thought to pass on with a bow, which was not adroit; she called you back, and you were caught. It was your own fault.

"So you are come our way, Monsieur George?" said she. "They have talked a deal of you up stairs. The ladies are at church. It isn't that they are more devout than it's right and proper to be, but it is a good habit for young folk. And to be sure, people that don't trouble themselves to do the like say they haven't time. Well now, do you know, Monsieur George, I have remarked that those that go to church get up early in the morning, always have their place tidied up before the others, and find themselves all the better for it. I have been to six o'clock mass, and you see my little place has been set to rights this long time; I have only to see to these poor canaries that were very impatient for me to come to them. Ah, the gluttons! They are pleased enough at this season, for plantain is in, and it makes them sing like seraphims. Sing away, poor little birdies, you shall never want for anything as long as I am here. Ah, Monsieur George, that's what one comes to when one is old and has no children; one gets attached to poor little birds or dumb things that one makes pets of. To be sure, for my own part, I am better off; I have my little neighbours; they are like the children of the house; it would be rather dull without them, though I contrive to be

always doing something, as you see. But you will take something; you have not breakfasted? I'll tell you what it is, we'll breakfast together. You have done us service enough to give us this mark of friendship besides." (George made a sign of assent). "I say *us*, for what you have done for them is the same as if it was done for me, and you took the noblest way to oblige them, and that is, to give them work, for here it is not easy, and, as their friends say, it is in Paris they would find plenty to do. But they did not like to leave the place where their mother lived, and they choose to live here under the eyes of some old friends."

And she proceeded to get breakfast ready, talking all the time.

"You shall have fresh eggs and good coffee. I am used to take pains with the coffee, for it is the only thing our little Jeanne cares for. When she has worked all day and comes in here late in the evening, I give her a little cup, and then she goes to sleep in the great easy chair yonder, while her sister works with her needle. For my part, if I took as much as a thimbleful of coffee at night, I could not close an eye, but young folk! When we look at her, her sister and I, sleeping there so calmly, we admire under our breath that dear, good, true-hearted creature, for we cosset her as if she was our child. Well now, would you believe me, that same child is the man of the house for courage and resolution. Her sister Anna, who could carry her off in her arms, fast asleep, as she would a feather, is a great deal more timid and would do nothing without consulting her."

The little breakfast was laid with extreme neatness. Madame Blanchemain placed George opposite the window, which overlooked the parterre, and whence he had glimpses of the wide landscape and the blue mountains through the openings in the foliage.

With all George's high cultivation, the society of simple folk was not irksome to him, when he found them natural and obliging. It was with gratitude, then, that he enjoyed the hospitality afforded him and the admirable spectacle he beheld through the open window, fringed with roses that peeped into the room. And then, who knows but he was already beginning to make his course of observations, and hoped to draw from so facile a source, some information respecting the past life of his *protégées*?

"How do you find your eggs? I hope they are done to your liking. They are Cochin China. That sort lays at all seasons. I will take you to see my poultry-yard, at the end of the little garden."

When the famous coffee was set on the table, with a jug of excellent cream, George led the conversation back to the subject of the young ladies.

"You knew their mother?" he said.

"Yes, I knew her well, and as I was her best friend, it was with me they chose to live, for we can often talk of her."

"Madame Duval, when left a widow, disposed of her husband's business, for a sum which, with her own industry, might suffice to bring up her children; but she was imprudent enough to place the money in doubtful hands. She had many cares and anxieties, not for herself, but for her daughters. Afterwards came sickness, then permanent feebleness, and then misfortune.—I can't, do you see, tell you the end of the story very plainly. Jeanne was sixteen, Anna was nineteen; she commended them to me, but she could not give me some explanations that I wanted as to the state of her affairs. As for the poor children they were in no state to think of them at all. Everything failed them at once. You have not perhaps noticed the white lock that runs through Jeanne's black hair; it turned that colour in one night. I walked those two, pale, broken-hearted looking young creatures about the great avenues of the forest to tire their limbs, and give some rest to their minds. I could not get a word out of them."

"At last, religion, love of work, and the desire to do as their mother would have wished, brought them round a bit, and I was still looking, as I always did with full faith, for help from Providence for them, when the good God sent you; for as sure as that is a Cochin China egg, you are a worthy honest young man, Monsieur George. I am a judge of looks, and, answerable as I am for them to their mother, I will receive you with all my heart, as she would do herself, if she were still here to take care of them. But the young ladies are come in. Why don't you go up, and have a look at the fine paintings they are preparing for you? I have seen them bring in magnificent flowers; they must work hard up there. Be sure you don't let out a word

of what I told you. Their grief is so sacred that they do not allow everybody to speak of it, and they have the pride of misfortune. Don't stay long, and look in upon me again when you come down. In the meantime I will clear away the breakfast and set things straight, for I can't bear to leave anything hanging on hands. Everybody has their little ways."

George thanked her, and timidly ascended the stairs that led to the little set of rooms on the first floor. He tapped at the door, opened it, and found himself in a room hung round with sketches, in presence of Jeanne, who was seated at a table covered with flowers.

She rose, looking very pale, and leaned on the back of her chair.

"*Already !*" she said, in an altered voice.

"Mademoiselle," said George, "that word is quite natural on your part, and quite justifiable. Never mind the painful impression it makes upon me. By that one word you recal me to a sense of my duty. I thought leave had been granted me to come and see your work in progress, but I ought to have awaited your orders, or at least have asked your special permission. Pray forgive me."

And bowing sadly, he withdrew.

CHAPTER XIX.

INTERPRETATION.

As soon as he was gone and Jeanne was left alone, she dropped on her chair, and fell to reflecting on that strange apparition. She was afraid she had done wrong in receiving that young man alone in her chamber. Anna had not yet come in. She felt that she had committed herself still more by the one word that had escaped her. In fact, if George had been a person whom she looked on with indifference, what could be simpler than to let him see her design, ask his opinion upon it in the ordinary way, and then allow him, with all due politeness, to take his leave? But to refuse him admission! was not that tantamount to saying to him: You are for me something else than an amateur of painting; you do not come to see flowers, but to see me; I know you do. I expected you, and I must not let it appear. She was distressed and disheartened; when her sister came in she found her greatly changed, and could hardly comprehend what had happened. That night, Jeanne went to bed with symptoms of fever.

As for George, he had felt his cold reception very keenly. He barely said good-bye to Madame Blanchemain, who observed to him with a laugh,—

“Nobody can complain that you make your visits too long.”

Then he betook himself to the shady glades of the forest, his favourite resort for meditation, and halted at the feet of

the Black Virgin, a venerated image which protects a cross-way in the forest, as if to call it to witness his laudable resolves. Presently he began to see things in their true light.

"If I were nothing to her," thought he, "she would have received me like anybody else; but she was frightened by my presence, and her paleness showed that the feeling was strong. Perhaps she was thinking of me and of the little pin that is already a sort of link between us."

In short, never was a man more rejoiced at having had the door shut in his face, as it were, by a word of reproach. Furthermore, it was clear to him that he was the injured party, and that this would be all to his advantage during the silence which was about to follow that brief interview.

Then he called to mind the girl's attitude as she leaned on the back of her chair, and the outlines of her flexible figure, which seemed never to have been cramped by useless ligatures; he saw again the bouquet of flowers that stood beside her; and revelling in these recollections he returned to Paris, to resume with confidence his life of active and faithful service.

CHAPTER XX.

A FRIEND.

WHAT had occurred in M. Wolff's mansion since we left it to accompany George on his travels.

Madame Wolff was uneasy in mind at the part she had played in the winter-garden, and incensed at the audacity of which she accused George. Her husband's anxious air and George's abrupt departure filled her with alarm. The torments of remorse affected her health, and she kept her room, where Borghèse watched her closely for fear of some untoward confession.

After George's return, when Borghèse thought her friend had been sufficiently punished for her levity, she said to her,—

“You hide your troubles from me, Louise. It is some vexation that makes you ill. Can you not grow hardened against Lady Wilson's pin pricks? What has happened to you?”

“Dear Borghèse,” said Madame Wolff, “it is not Lady Wilson that provokes my indignation, it is—you could never imagine it. But you have my full confidence; you have given me so many marks of true friendship that you must hear my complaint and advise me. To tell you the whole matter, and you are the only person to whom I dare divulge it—do you remember that foolish wager?”

“What wager?” Borghèse inquired with an air of unconsciousness.

“Well, about that foolish pin with which people have con-

trived to busy the whole house. You yourself, did you not defy me like the rest?"

"Yes, and where's the harm? I remember now that you lost, and that you paid Lady Wilson the few louis that were staked. Do you regret having done so? Lady Wilson is charitable in spite of her oddities, and the money has been of use to a poor family. I know it for a fact."

"Well, it is not the money I regret, but since you suspect nothing, I must tell you all. I won the bet, and there is that odious pin, that I know not what to do with, and could almost believe was bewitched, from the vexation and torment I have felt ever since that detestable wager."

"How long has it been your custom, Louise, to pay the bets you win? Why are you so generous?"

"Because it is to you alone, Borghèse, I will confess that I won, because you are kind and indulgent, because you know me, and because your Monsieur George, whom you have taken for a saint, is a designing and audacious man whom you must distrust. I should blush to relate to anybody else what happened to me."

"Good heavens! what is it?" exclaimed Borghèse; "what can he have done to you, the poor young man?"

"Why, that innocent took advantage of a moment when I was half put to sleep by his talk, to—to—kiss me in the winter-garden."

"Ha! ha! that is funny! Only think of this schoolboy, who kisses ladies with all the doors open!"

"You may laugh, Borghèse, and do like the rest, you that I thought better and more charitable. Do you suppose that if I had any apprehension of exposing myself to such insolence, I would have bargained with him for his fine relic? But that is not all. It was very innocent, what happened, was it not? But then it may be misinterpreted and misreported. Did you notice M. Wolff's abrupt and thoughtful air? And how do you account for George's sudden departure? Is it a Gymnase drama, in which I am assigned a part? Am I then a faithless wife because an impertinent has presumed to touch me with his lips? And is my seducer punished for his good fortune by his exile?—All this is perfectly ridiculous. Dear Borghèse, you can answer for me. You know the esteem and affection I have for M. Wolff; you know my whole life. You must come

with me that we may tell this pitiable story, and that it may be known that the virtuous and sedate George makes no scruple to kiss the wife of his protector by surprise."

"But after all," said Borghèse, "a man does not kiss a woman *à propos* of nothing. I have been ten times alone with him, when he came to play on the piano with me, and, like everybody else, I have found him respectful and almost timid in a *tête-à-tête*. Come now, recollect; you must have said or done something that looked like encouragement. What was it?"

"*Mon Dieu!* a mere nothing. I was eager to win; you know I like to succeed in whatever I attempt, and, I know not why, I was bent on having the pin; and so——"

"And so?"

"I plucked a pomegranate flower, and offered it him for his pin, the value of which, by some unaccountable childish freak, seemed to augment in proportion to his resistance."

"And then?"

"And then I put the flower in my girdle, and while I was asleep——"

"You went to sleep, Louise? You think all that very innocent? You see, however, what it has brought you to."

"I know it but too well!" said Madame Wolff; "but it is not moral reflections I ask of you, Borghèse, but a means of getting out of this absurd position."

"The means I could find," said Borghèse, "but upon two conditions, and the first of them would appear to you intolerable."

"What is it then?"

"My dear Louise, it is that you should hear a regular sermon."

Madame lay back on her couch with a look of disappointment. Borghèse seated herself in front of her with an air of authority.

"My dear girl," she began, "you are good natured, you are virtuous, you love your husband, who is the most devoted and generous of men, you have your time at your own disposal, you can create for yourself useful and delightful occupations, you are in the most envied position, and you have the rare privilege of being able to bestow your liberality on the distressed. And how do you employ your time? In puerilities, in listening to idle words, in

encouraging malicious gossip, in planning hazardous enterprises, like that out of which you cannot extricate yourself, and in provoking by your coquetry the attention of an innocent youth wholly intent on his duties. Do you comprehend the danger of all this ? ”

“ You know well that I do, dear Borghèse, since I appeal to you for help.”

“ And now,” said Borghèse, “ for another condition. If I save you from this peril, will you forgive me all the means I have thought it right to employ, I whom you defied to protect George under my white wing. And do you further promise me that you will be like a sage and prudent mother to this young man ? ”

“ You know I promise you all you desire. But speak will you, naughty friend ? ”

“ Well then, be it known to you, that I watched over you, for it is not without danger that people go to sleep under myrtles in bloom. I now give you back the kiss I took from you, and the flower you grudge me so much.”

And she dropped a faded pomegranate blossom at her feet.

“ I myself, your Borghèse, am the impertinent of whom you complain. Poor George is quite innocent of the offence ; he was already far away, so much did he dread your enchantments ; and as for the pin I bestowed on you, I beg you will believe it is not bewitched.”

“ I am furious ! ” said Madame Wolff, overjoyed at this *dénouement* ; “ but why did you let me suffer so long, and rack myself with conjectures about George’s departure ? ”

“ To punish you and to avenge him,” said Borghèse, seriously.

The two friends embraced, and mutually pledged themselves to secrecy.

Madame Wolff was cured. In the drawing-room that evening, everybody was in good humour. Madame Wolff, leaning on her husband’s arm, received George with quite motherly kindness. He had the honours of the *soirée*, and was made to give an account of his travels. M. Wolff congratulated him, and signified his intention of giving him an interest in his business. Peace of mind and discretion had come back to that house, thanks to the forethought of a friend.

CHAPTER XXI.

A BIT OF WAY.

GEORGE returned to business with double courage, for he felt all he owed to M. Wolff, and furthermore, he now had well defined plans for the future. All his reflections confirmed him in the excellent opinion he had conceived of his *protégées*, and the rejection of his visit, far from offending him, increased all his hopes.

It was with new ardour, therefore, that he set about putting himself *au courant* of the affairs of the always busy and prosperous house of Wolff. Sleepless nights were not distressing to him, for he said to himself, "I know now who will reap the benefit of them."

Some days passed in this way, and then George received a letter one morning, bearing the Saint Germain post mark, and directed in a shaky handwriting that was not known to him.

Nothing in George's character could justify us in accusing him of coxcombry, and yet it must be confessed that he had rather expected this letter. Its contents were as follows:—

"MY DEAR MONSIEUR GEORGE,

"It is very fortunate that you left me your address, for I wanted much to write to you, and I do not like to mention it to our neighbours.

"What have you done, Monsieur George, you whose modest air and good heart inspired me with so much confidence?

"I asked you to go up and see my dear children, and I

do not know what happened. We could get nothing out of Jeanne, whom you found alone, and who has been ever since quite melancholy and quite unwell.

"I need not tell you that when one puts people under an obligation, one ought to treat them with still more consideration and respect. I wish to believe that you have nothing to reproach yourself with.

"If your conscience is at ease, come and see me on Sunday morning, for I want to talk to you seriously and confidentially. We shall be alone.

"Hoping that you are still worthy of our friendship, I heartily salute you.

"V^E. BLANCHEMAIN."

Glad of this recal, but anxious about Jeanne's health, George presented himself on Sunday morning at the door of the white house.

"Come in, naughty boy!" said Madame Blanchemain, "I have many things to say to you whilst we are alone. Tell me frankly, Monsieur George—this is entirely between ourselves—tell me as if you were speaking to your own mother or to Jeanne's, what did you say to that poor child, what did you do to her that she should be in so sad a state? You passed through the church to enter this house of angels; they are under obligations to you, as I have already said. This imposed great duties upon you and a reserve of which I believed you very capable, and I think myself a good judge of physiognomy. Why did you misuse the admission which your business obtained for you into this house to bring trouble into it? Answer me at once. If you only wanted to form one of those frivolous connections in which so many young people lose their present and their future, why did you not go to people that would be ready to meet you half way? You have no lack of them in Paris. If you came only for business, how is it that you have succeeded in doing us more harm than your bounty has done us good? And yet, for all that, you look like a good, honest lad; but speak, speak, I say, that I may see if you are the friend that Providence had in store for us, or an enemy who has crept in under our roof in the name of charity. And don't think you can deceive me," she added, taking a pinch of snuff and looking sternly at him.

"Make your mind easy," said George, smiling, as soon as he could get in a word, "I have nothing to reproach myself with, and I am still worthy of your friendship and theirs. Jeanne's countenance, her talent, and what I heard of her from an honourable man like M. Redouté, made me esteem and respect her from the first, and that impression could not fail to be confirmed by all I have seen here. The very place in which I first met Jeanne at Saint Germain ought to be a guarantee to you for my conduct. When you asked me to go up stairs to her the other day, she appeared vexed at my coming back so soon, and at one single word from her lips, I apologised and withdrew, and promised that I would not appear before her again without her permission. What could I do? But you must not believe that I harbour the least resentment for this cold reception. On the contrary, I had the more reason to esteem Jeanne for her very natural susceptibility and her prudent reserve, and I was as glad to withdraw as others would have been eager to remain. You see, dear Madame Blanchemain, that I am still perhaps the person you looked for to aid and love your children; you see that I am not unworthy of your confidence and your hospitality."

And he held out his hand to her.

"Well, my dear boy, you comfort my poor heart," said Madame Blanchemain, taking his hand, and holding it in both her own. "But, tell me, what do you mean to do now? For after what you have just been saying, I begin to understand the state of Jeanne's feelings more clearly. Have you formed any plans for the future? You will meet in the ordinary course of things with favourable opportunities for settling yourself in life, and if you begin an intimacy here, founded as much as you please on esteem and respect, who knows but that what is for you a temporary intimacy, may become for Jeanne a life-long attachment, and that you are unintentionally leading her into a cruel mistake? Is it not better that all this should be fairly talked over between reasonable people, before going further on a road on which it is difficult to turn back?"

"Dear Madame Blanchemain," said George, "you have spoken of Providence, and I, too, believe in Him. I believe it was Providence that made me acquainted with Jeanne; I believe that this intimacy answers to the dearest longings

of my heart. I know that my mother will offer no impediment to my wishes, and of this I will give you proof. But for the present I am not free to declare my intentions, and I hope that you will approve of this prudence on my part. You shall be my confidant, and you will aid me to pave the way for Jeanne's happiness. I shall have need of you to keep her spirits up, and we will conspire together, if you please, to secure for her a happy future."

"That is what I call speaking to the purpose," said Madame Blanchemain. "Now you must go up and console the afflicted; and mind you take counsel with your good sense and your heart, that you may not hurt their feelings while wishing to serve them."

Madame Blanchemain went in first.

"My dear," she said to Jeanne, who was still alone, "here is M. George, who would like to know how your paintings are getting on."

George now came forward and offered his hand with a look that implored pardon. Jeanne gave him hers, frankly and cordially, saying:—

"I had need of your counsels."

And she sank back on her large easy chair, looking rather pale.

George now observed that everything in the room was just as it had been on the day of his brief visit. The same design was on the table, the same bouquet, then so fresh and bright, now drooped its faded flowers down the sides of the tall glass in which its stalks were fixed, and Jeanne herself, with her features changed by illness, was she not like a faded flower? She revived, however, almost immediately, and there was life in her eyes.

"I have not been able to do anything this week," she said; "I was not well, but I feel better; and besides it was needful, perhaps, that I should consult you. What a pity! These poor flowers will not do for us now."

And she raised them up as if she pitied them.

"I will go and look for others," said George, "for we must push on our business and make up for lost time."

"Make haste then," said Madame Blanchemain; "breakfast will be ready when you come back."

An hour later, the family—what a sweet name to adopt for the occasion!—Anna and Jeanne, Madame Blanchemain

and George, were assembled in the parlour below stairs. Confidence and serenity sat on every face. George, such is the might of self-sacrifice, emptied without apparent repugnance, and to the very bottom, the sort of cup of affliction which Madame Blanchemain had set before him. It was the triumph of the Vin de Mareil.

"It is not so bad," said the good dame, complacently, "but it is still better with water."

A gardener came in with a choice gathering of the finest flowers, and set them out in the room. The breakfast was very gay and very friendly.

When coffee was poured out, Jeanne, who could not be prevailed on to take anything for some days, did not refuse the handsome white and gold cup which Madame Blanchemain poured out for her with extraordinary care, adding to it the top of the contents of the cream jug.

"She is our spoiled child," said she to George. "Now let us take you a turn in our park. We have only to open the door."

Accordingly the family found themselves in a few minutes under the verdant domes of the forest. You know the Etoile des Neuf Routes, the Butte du Houx, and the Val, charming spots, made lovelier still by the good spirits of the new friends. George gave his arm to Madame Blanchemain; the two sisters walked near them, and sometimes the party scattered. When they were near the Val, they halted on the slope of the hill, with an enchanting scene before them, and silence and solitude to lend their aid to the imagination. George sat by Jeanne's side, and they had nothing to say to one another. Had she not given him her hand? Had she not said to him, with a look of deep meaning, "*I had need of your counsels?*" Everything was comprised in those words.

As usual with those who visit that part of the majestic forest, the friends issued from it by the royal gate. All visitors are struck by the transition, which has not perhaps its parallel in the world.

You come out from a dim light like that shed through the coloured windows of a cathedral, and you find yourself in presence of a radiant immensity. Before you is the open sky, and from the circular plateau that overlooks the landscape you see at your feet the land of the living, watered by

its great river, enlivened by its numerous villages, with its fertile fields, that yield bread and wine, its woods that give shade in summer and firing for winter, and its amphitheatre of graceful hills. Thus you retrace your steps, noting the details of the changeful spectacle, to the parterre and the old château.

But it was necessary that business, too, should be thought of. Important practical questions were discussed; flowers were grouped so as to produce harmonies or contrasts, according to the master's principle; nature was aided, and work and conversation went on together in that chamber, where everything told of taste and art in the midst of saintly poverty. Thus a crystal cup bore for a garland a chaplet of large beads, and formed with it a graceful group. Some well-known books of our best and chastest authors indicated the predilections of the inmates of the dwelling, and albums contained views of interesting spots in the forest. An excellent female portrait in crayons, worthy of Latour, was hung in the best place. It attracted George's attention.

"It is my mother's portrait," said Jeanne. "How well the eyes are done! One would think she was looking at you."

No more was said on the subject.

How fast time flew! George stood up; it was time for him to go. Jeanne also rose and held out her hand to him.

"*Already!*" she said, venturing to smile.

It was an expiation, as it were, for the cruel word of the other day. So the friends separated, but not without agreeing to meet again on the following Sunday, to inspect the week's work and prepare for new.

As Madame Blanchemain opened the door for George, she whispered in his ear:—

"I am pleased with you. Cheer up, you have made a bit of way to-day."

CHAPTER XXII.

EXILE.

It is God's law that everything in nature shall pursue a course of progress or of decline; nothing is stable, nothing immutable. The sun, pale at its rising, aspires to the zenith, and descends to quench its fire in the waves; the sea shivers, rages, tosses its foam over the tops of the cliffs, and then, exhausted by its vain efforts, it becomes again but a mirror in which the halcyon sees its image reflected. Plants quickened by the spring, rear their heads vigorously, until the heat of summer parches them and they become the sport of the winds. Poor human beings! so it is with your feelings; reason is not always a guide potent enough to keep them within sober limits.

Thus it was that the intimacy between George and Jeanne grew closer with every succeeding Sunday visit. Thus it was that, after a walk in the forest on a fine August evening, George was seated by Jeanne's side in the working room, whilst Anna was in the next room playing on an organ, borrowed from a friend, one of those slow airs, which seem, as it were, to echo the tenderest feelings. The window was open, and the perfumes of the woods, wafted in by warm gusts of air, added their enervating power to the influence of the organ, whose sounds imitate so truthfully the plaintive voice of man.

"You say nothing, George," said Jeanne, "and yet we are together, and when I refused you this hand, you told me you would be happy when it rested in yours; and yet you hold

it, and you retain it almost against my will. Why have you lost your gaiety and your elastic spirits ! Why does your look grow sadder the more it is bent on me ? ‘Is there woe in my eyes that they should impart it to others,’ as you read to us the other day from that book in which there are so many good things which we must read over again. That is how I should like to see you always, with a book or a pencil in your hand. Idleness is not good for you. Take that album and sketch us something.”

“No, I am not happy,” said George, “because I am going away ; the night-fall is always a bitter time for me here. Jeanne, I must tell you all ; I will not, cannot part from you more. My position is secure and sufficient to justify your trusting your life to me. My mother has given me full liberty, and you are your own mistress. If you have understood all the love I bear you, though I have never spoken of it, be my darling wife, and we will never part again.”

“George,” said Jeanne, “you talk like a child, and I thought you a man. It is my fault, I will not accuse anyone. I read so much grief in your eyes when I dismissed you with a word, the day when you entered this room alone, and I felt such remorse for my hardness, that I let you return ; and then friendship came, and then intimacy ; till in the end what made you happy for a few days now makes you wretched.”

“It rests only with you,” said George, “that I should be happy for ever.”

“For ever !” replied Jeanne, “and who knows if that new happiness will last as long as that which no longer suffices you ? Do you so much as know who we are ? Do you know the state of our affairs ? Do you know that my sister and I are but one being, and that our lives would be broken if they were separated ? No, George, I ought to have foreseen all this, I have had a glimmering of it for some time past. Do not force your destiny, do not take counsel of a summer evening, of the perfume of roses, and the tones of an organ ; listen to sober reason, and give your mind time for reflection. The hand of misfortune is upon us. Work and study sometimes makes us forget it ; but family affairs, which expose us to much hostility, require solitude. We have never mentioned this to anybody, not even to good Madame Blanchemain, and until this matter,

which concerns the revered memory of our mother, is ended, leave us, George, to our troubles. Retain for us your brotherly friendship, which will make us sometimes forget them, and be a sober-minded man."

"The more troubles you have, dear Jeanne," said George, "the more you belong to me. These family affairs may be cleared up with the help of a friend, and his presence may be a protection against the hostile; and as for your sister Anna, what joy it would be to have her with us, not to separate those whom heaven has so well united, to be three and but one, and to give two mothers to our children!"

"Be silent, George, and listen to the order I am going to give. I have fully considered all; I know who you are, I know all the devotedness of which you are capable, but that that devotedness may be durable, it must be tried by absence."

"I submit to everything, dear Jeanne; whatever you impose on me will be easy to me, provided you promise me the recompense I look for."

"You will leave us," said Jeanne; "you will be long, very long without seeing us; but you will live for us and we will live for you. It is not so hard as you think, George, for it is not my hand, my hair, my eyes that you love, it is my soul, and my soul will be with you. When you are gone, when you have lost sight of the white house, ponder well the last words of your Jeanne, and you will see that she has spoken truly. You will remain away a year; and then, and then, when all the cold of a winter, all the frosts of absence, when all the billows of the world in which you are going to live again shall have passed over this ardour of a day, of a fine summer evening, then, George, if you still feel as you do now, come and look for your Jeanne, whom you will find waiting for you on this spot."

"A year!" exclaimed George; "and you? will you not suffer from this absence?"

"No, George, I feel it in me that I shall be strong and happy."

"Well," said George, "give me a token. I am leaving you. I wish, Jeanne, that my last look should find you such as I saw you, Jeanne, when God first put you in my way. I will take away that pin which I lent you, and which still fastens your black scarf."

"No, George, no, my brother, you shall not do that ill-natured act. The last recollection you shall take with you from here shall not be that of a bare shoulder, but that of a look of kindness. Leave me this sign of your friendship, I will not give it back before a year is past ; but see here."

She rose, and searching in a little black velvet casket with fantastic copper ornaments, she produced a little diamond cross.

"We have suffered much," she continued, "I can own it to you without shame. The value of this cross would have been very useful to us, often indispensable for the day's bread ; but we, too, have our talisman, George, and this is it. Our mother wore it, and she had it from her mother. We have always treasured it preciousy. Take this cross, I cannot give you a better token, and now farewell and be of good courage. Anna, come and bid farewell to our brother George, who is going away for a very long time."

George shook hands with both sisters without uttering a word. Then looking in upon Madame Blanchemain, who could not imagine what it was that had moved him so, and enjoining that kind soul to take good care of her dear young friends, and write to him if anything serious occurred, he went away in tears.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WEAKNESS.

FOR all George's fortitude, we shall not be surprised to find him quite changed, continuing his daily occupations with his accustomed assiduity, but taking no pleasure in the various recreations which M. and Madame Wolff's incessant kindness afforded him.

The winter passed away in silence and meditation, a few messages and a few souvenirs alone beguiling the tedium of absence. Meanwhile, George was no longer like his former self. He no longer possessed that prompt alacrity which before had been so prominent a trait in his character. He waited for orders and executed them with great punctuality, but his thoughts were elsewhere. He pictured to himself Jeanne seated, all pale, in her easy chair, her sister watching by her, and Madame Blanchemain talking to her without end by way of comforting her.

Jeanne betrayed no sign of grief in her letters, but tried to encourage George by displaying a cheerfulness in which he would not believe, knowing, as he did, that difficulties were troubling that home which he had thought to make the abode of peace.

The twelve designs for Canada had long been finished. They had been greatly admired by M. Wolff, and approved by Redouté who sometimes dined at the house. Fresh orders had been given, and activity continued to reign in the little studio in the white house.

On one of the first fine days of the year George received a picture he had not ordered. The letter accompanying it stated that it was a thirteenth gratis, according to the custom of the trade. It represented a collection of myosotis, eglantiers (briar rose), roses, coreopsis and iris, thrown profusely into a basket of moss. Below the basket, in one corner of the picture, lay a white columbine, half faded and shrivelled, which seemed to be intended for the artist's signature.

Never was work of art more tenderly fondled by the pencil of Mignon, who carried delicacy of finish to its utmost limits, as may be seen in his charming works preserved in the Louvre. The mouse-ears (myosotis) lay here and there, peeped out through the moss, and strayed through the wire-work of the basket. The dew drops on the fantastically shaped iris were diamonds of the purest water.

George uttered a cry of admiration, and could have knelt before that incomparable page. He remained long in contemplation of the basket, fancying at one time that he saw the wind agitating the delicate flowers, at another that he saw Jeanne, spent with long work, bending her lithe form over that labour of patience.

Then he tried to make out what mystic meaning there might be in those flowers, thrown together without any apparent order; and he discovered that, whether by chance or intentionally, the initials of the flowers, arranged in the order in which we have named them, formed the word *merci*! (thanks!)

Nor could he doubt that the little columbine which lay prostrate at the border of the picture, was an emblematic portrait of Jeanne.

How many hours were spent in that silent *tête-à-tête*! He was still in the same spot when he received a letter, the tremulous handwriting of which he instantly recognised.

"MY DEAR MONSIEUR GEORGE," said the letter, "I promised to tell you the truth, for our poor children are too brave and too proud to complain; but I must not leave you in ignorance that they have suffered much, and that poor Jeanne is much enfeebled. I am not acquainted with their affairs, for they will not tell me anything, but I have seen

lawyers come here. Don't think of coming to us, for Jeanne would not forgive you for wanting fortitude. I only give you this information that you may find means, through some discreet friend, to have an eye to what is going on here; I cannot tell you how, but perhaps your heart will suggest to you some good plan. Courage! and farewell.

“Your devoted friend,

“VEUVE BLANCHEMAIN.”

This state of things appeared frightful to George. To know that his *protégées* were exposed without defence to powerful adversaries, to picture to himself poor Jeanne worn out with toil and illness, resisting, by her own sole energies, he knew not what exactions, and concealing even from her most intimate friend, Madame Blanchemain, the sufferings she endured—he could no longer bear such torture; he felt himself released from his promise by the peril Jeanne was in. He was leaving the room to hasten to Saint Germain, when Borghèse's kindly face met him in the doorway.

“It seems you are always to be my guardian angel, dear Borghèse,” he said, returning with her into the room. “You alone can save me. I am unhappy, and I can have no other confidant than you, my kind and indulgent friend.”

“You are in love, George,” said Borghèse, coolly. “No need to look long in your face to find that out. But if you would compose yourself a little, and not look so scared, it would not be amiss. This picture, eh? what is it? It is a consignment that has been sent you. And these letters strewed about! what is the meaning of all this? I can hardly recognise you, George, you who were so attentive, so affable, you are grown silent, you seek for solitude; no more music, no more pleasant conversations. M. Wolff himself is growing uneasy. I was coming to hear your lamentations and to console you. I could not arrive more *à propos*. Do try to conceal the cause of your agitation at least a little, if you wish that I should be your sole confidant; for, if you do not take care, everybody will read your secret in your face.”

“Thanks, dear Borghèse; I will hear more of your good

counsel another time ; but at present I must presume upon the friendship of which you have given me so many proofs, to entreat you to go instantly upon an errand of mercy. Here is the address of one who is suffering and whom I cannot succour. Try to ascertain the cause of her distress and put me in the way to relieve it."

Then he wrote on Jeanne's own letter, which she had enclosed with the painting, these few words :—

"Dear Jeanne,

"Put implicit confidence in the devoted friend who will hand you this letter. She comes to aid you.

"GEORGE."

And he gave this passport to Borghèse, who promised to start on the instant and to be soon back.

Two hours later, Borghèse, accompanied by her maid, was at Saint Germain. The little white house had been well described to her and she found it easily. She was soon in presence of Jeanne, who was so intent on her painting that she hardly observed her entrance into the room.

"Mademoiselle Jeanne," said Borghèse, after a moment's pause of astonishment at seeing a face which she thought was not unknown to her, "do you know this writing ? "

And she handed Jeanne her own letter with the few words added by George.

Jeanne was profuse in her thanks and her expressions of regret for the trouble her visitor had been good enough to take, but said she had no need of assistance.

"Oh ! Mademoiselle Jeanne, you may tell that to others, but not to a friend like me. I am too much bent on executing my commission conscientiously to be content with such an answer. My name is Borghèse ; I am an old friend of M. Wolff's. We are all deeply distressed at seeing, as we have done for some time, how much George, whom we all love, and who is so amiable and excellent a young man, is changed in looks, health, and spirits. Now all his distress is caused by anxiety on your account, and as I have had the good fortune to render him some services, and he knows that he can rely on my zeal and discretion, he has commissioned me to represent him here ; and I thank him for it, for I have no difficulty in perceiving how worthy you are

of all interest. So if you have any regard for this poor George, who, it seems, is forbidden to show himself here, you must at least let him know your troubles. Your keeping him in exile may be for some pique, or it may be to try him, or for some other reason which it does not concern me to know ; but at least do give him an opportunity to serve you in some way or other."

And she held out her hand in pledge of her sincerity.

"Madam," said Anna, "we are grateful for your kindness ; but how could we, at a first interview, disclose our private troubles to one whose presence indeed does us honour, but who after all is not known to us ? Would it not be merely giving ourselves increased pain to no purpose ?"

"Very true, Mademoiselle ; I have no right to demand your confidence, and if I implore it, I do so only for the sake of that poor George whom I know you esteem, and in whom I certainly have a right to be interested. Besides, as for the troubles that are besetting you, either they are an affair of money, and in that case something can always be done with the help of friends, or as I surmise from some words which George let fall, there are personal hostilities in play ; but these can be combated. I entreat you, Mademoiselle Jeanne ; you who appear to be already so unwell, do not suffer yourself to be quite broken down by a silence which has its excuse in a very honourable pride, but which will make everybody wretched if you do not take care. Do I look like an inquisitive person who intrudes upon you to break your quiet ? If my face expresses my feelings, you must read in it my earnest desire to serve you and to save George, who can no longer live in his present state of anxiety."

"Well, Madame," said Jeanne, overcome at last by Borghèse's evident frankness and good nature, "I do not wish to make anyone suffer ; and if it is absolutely requisite to the fulfilment of your mission that you should be made acquainted with our misfortune, I submit to that necessity."

She wiped her crimson face, and making a bold effort to overcome her reluctance, continued thus :—

"We lost our mother," (here she took her sister's hand), "and with her we lost everything. She had owed ten thousand francs to a relation, in whose hands she subsequently placed a sum of thirty thousand francs realised out of the property left by my father. This sum covered

her old debt, and left at our disposal, in the hands of our distant kinsman, a sum of twenty thousand francs, which was all our inheritance. The receipt was carefully preserved by our mother, who spoke of it to us in her last illness. 'My children,' she said, 'I will tell you when the right moment is come, where you will find it, for I am afraid of some surprise.' But before that moment came, we lost our poor mother, and we were too much afflicted to think of that unfortunate receipt. We have never found it. Our kinsman died soon after, and his heirs have made a peremptory demand upon us for the ten thousand francs which our mother formerly owed.

"We made ourselves responsible for that amount, for we desired to keep our mother's name and honour inviolate, but we have not yet been able to save up more than a small portion of the sum. In vain we assert that our kinsman's estate owes us a balance of twenty thousand francs; we have no other proof of this than our bare word, and the adverse party, relying on the written security for the amount of which we made ourselves responsible, insists on forcing us——"

"Why this is infamous!" cried Borghèse. "And you have not consulted anyone? Now I must tell you at once, my poor dears, that the paper you accepted and signed is null and void, for you were not of age when you lost your mother. There is some villainous roguery on foot here. You must give me the names of the heirs who are tormenting you; we shall get the better of them, take my word for it; but above all things be sure you sign nothing."

There was an earnestness and a force of conviction in Borghèse's manner and words which there was no resisting, and Anna, after a look of inquiry in Jeanne's face, wrote some addresses and gave them to Borghèse along with some stamped papers, begging her at the same time not to let their secret escape.

"Of course," said Borghèse. "But now let us talk of poor George. Will you keep him very long in penance? Have you at least any consolation to offer him, anything to give me for him which I shall have received from your hand, Mademoiselle Jeanne, that I may lay it in his? He is so unhappy!"

Jeanne pondered for a moment.

"If I might venture, Madam, I would ask you to take charge of a small picture. It is our mother's portrait which George wished long ago to copy for himself. It strikes me that such an occupation would be agreeable and useful to him at this moment."

And she took down the picture and kissed it.

"Give it me," said Borghèse, "it is a good thought."

"But we shall give Madame too much trouble," said Anna.

"I have my maid with me," said Borghèse ; "but do not be at all uneasy. I answer for the safety of this precious portrait which you must prize as a treasure. Farewell and thanks, my dears, for having allowed me to fulfil my mission. Keep your courage up, you will probably hear soon from us, and above all, if it is not yet too late, sign nothing."

Before Borghèse took her leave she examined the modest *appartement* of the two sisters with interest and curiosity, and looked in upon Madame Blanchemain to thank her on George's part. Lastly she looked with particular attention on the little white house, almost hidden under its roses, and greatly admired its pretty and picturesque appearance.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MANTES LA JOLIE.

At last there was something for George to do, something to lift him out of that stagnant loneliness and inertness in which he was wasting away. He touched with reverent lips the portrait which Borghèse put into his hands ; perhaps she had told him that Jeanne had done the same thing. He thanked that excellent friend for having served him so well, but he had quite other work to do than to sit down to draw.

The high position he had reached in the house of Wolff allowed him his full liberty in case of urgent need ; and he sat down to examine the documents which had been put into his hands.

"All is not lost !" he said, and set off forthwith for Mantes, where lived the intractable heirs, who were the sole cause of so much wretchedness.

Mantes, which is styled La Jolie, and which in everybody's opinion is worthy of that epithet, appeared to him the most detestable spot on earth. On sending in his name to M. Doucet, the cruel persecutor of the orphans, George resolved to go warily to work, and he represented himself as commissioned to propose an arrangement in the affair of the demoiselles Duval.

He found M. Doucet a middle aged man, very plump, very affable, and rather jovial, with everything about him denoting comfort and easy circumstances.

"Sir," said George, "your obliging reception of me and

the friendly disposition you evince, induce me to hope that you will help me to relieve my clients from a very painful position."

"You are right, Sir," replied the stout gentleman; "honest folks recognize each other at a glance; it is a sort of freemasonry. I am sure we shall be able to come to an understanding. I am quite aware of the honourable feelings of the persons in question, who, *ma foi*, are charming, and though I am for the moment their adversary, ha! ha! I can't help now and then complimenting them upon their charms."

"Sir," said George, "I suppose we are here to speak of business."

"Just so, Sir, just so. As heir to my excellent Uncle Doucet, whom I shall ever regret, and as administrator of the estate of that esteemed relative, I am under the necessity of demanding of the demoiselles Duval, maiden ladies of full age, payment of ten thousand francs which their mother owed to my good Uncle Doucet, with interest from the date of the receipt. But don't be uneasy, I am by nature disposed to combine all possible amenity with the execution of my duty, and the ladies——"

"But, Sir, you well know that these young people have nothing in the world, and find it very difficult to subsist by the work of their hands."

"No doubt, but they have friends," said M. Doucet, with a laugh, "they have friends, for everybody is interested in those charming persons, and they well deserve it."

"And besides, why do you hold them responsible for engagements contracted by their mother, who left them nothing? for they were not of age when they became orphans, and you know perfectly well that they owe nothing."

"Ah! my dear Sir," replied M. Doucet, with air of profound conviction, "how little you know the persons of whom you are speaking. Such heart, such self-denial! Do you know that they have done a very rare thing, and that it will be set down to the credit side of their account in—a better world."

"And what was that extraordinary thing they did?"

"Filial piety, Sir, filial piety! They recognized and spontaneously confirmed the debt due by their mother, when

their majority enabled them to make themselves personally responsible. No more was needed than a few threats, no great thing ; we were to seize the furniture, some family pictures, a mere nothing : the whole was not worth a thousand francs ; well, Sir, they acknowledged themselves debtors in the sum of ten thousand francs. It is admirable, Sir ! ”

“ But of course you don’t think of availing yourself of so irregular a document ? ” said George ; “ for after all the consideration for the debt cannot be specified in it. ”

“ The document is perfectly regular, ” said M. Doucet, benignly ; “ but permit me to observe there were all sorts of ways of coming to an arrangement, but they did not choose. ”

“ In the first place if they had consented to be a little amiable, why then, one would have seen ; one is quite disposed to be considerate when one is treated one’s self in a certain manner, and it was perhaps for their interest—but they are very proud ; very proud they are ; they wear their poverty like a diadem, Sir, like a diadem, I repeat the word. Mon Dieu ! it is superb ! but then I say, ‘ My fair demoiselles, pay me my money or let me seize, ’—as in the opera, you know. ”

And he burst into a horse-laugh.

“ Sir, ” said George, rising, “ this affair might lead you a longer way than you think—— ”

“ Oh ! my right is clear, I can seize to-morrow. But I am a good-natured man ; it is not for nothing I am named Doucet, ha ! ha ! Excuse me ; even in business I like a touch of gaiety. ”

“ Your proceedings will be narrowly watched, ” said George, “ and if ever—— ”

“ Ah ! my dear Sir, in business matters one should never lose temper. Either I have the law on my side or I have not ; it is as simple as how d’ye do ; and in taking up the matter in this tone you perhaps forget the true interests of your amiable clients. But that is not all ; you think me hard, intractable ? You don’t know M. Doucet ! Ask in the neighbourhood what people think of M. Doucet. The whole town of Mantes la Jolie will tell you I am the most affable of men. I am a member of the Benificent Institution, and I have been churchwarden ; I should be so still but for

annoyances that—but this would lead us too far. In short, I would not hurt a fly. And, to return to your demoiselles, have we not offered them the means of getting out of the scrape without drawing their purse strings? Only the other day we were on the point of coming to a settlement, but the little one—what's her name?"

"Mademoiselle Jeanne," said George. "Well?"

"Well, she has a will of her own, that little woman. Ha! if she ever marries.—By-the-bye, she is not amiss, and——"

"To the point, Sir," said George, angrily. "What were your conciliatory proposals?"

"Why, you know that strange pretence of theirs that they hold in reserve a receipt for thirty thousand francs, which, according to their statement, was placed by Madame Duval in Uncle Doucet's hands, but of which we find, *vrai Dieu!* not a trace in his books or papers, which were well kept, however, for he was close, that he was, the good man! Can you imagine such a reason for refusing to pay one's debts?—And where is it, this receipt for thirty thousand francs? What is become of it?—'Ah! we don't know. It is somewhere or other.' (Here he imitated a female voice).

'Why that is no way to do business,' said we, 'you are interesting persons; you are engaged in the fine arts——' I am very fond of the fine arts, Sir; I have always regretted that Mantes la Jolie does not possess a museum. Yes, Sir, the arts, literature, poetry, and all that sort of thing, stir my imagination: it is a weakness of mine—Well, said I to the amiable Jeanne, who is a flower among flowers, ha! ha! said I to her only the other day, 'Let us say no more about the matter, we shall never be able to come to an understanding. Let us go about our business, each our own way; only acknowledge that you have received the thirty thousand francs which you claim without reason, without a scrap of paper to show for it, without a shadow of proof, and we, on our side, will benevolently renounce our claim to recover the ten thousand francs, for which we can produce documentary evidence, in due form, bearing both your signatures, and we will tear up your receipt and give you the fragments.' For my part, Sir, I call that straightforward dealing, liberality, magnanimity.—Now then, you begin to have a better opinion of that poor M. Doucet, who

has been so much maligned? If you are a man of sense you may settle this affair; it is a mere misunderstanding."

"Assuredly I will take it upon myself to do so," said George. "I now know what I wanted to know, and you will find me again in your way before you have consummated this iniquity. Good day, Sir."

"As you please, Sir," replied Doucet, opening the door for him. "But," said he, shouting after him down the staircase, "in business, one should never lose one's temper. I salute you with amenity."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PORTRAIT.

GEORGE was furious. He hurried back to Paris and consulted an able lawyer, who promised to examine into the affair. It was some comfort to him, however, that Borghèse had earnestly enjoined the sisters to sign nothing and promise nothing.

One day he was in his chamber, sitting sadly before the precious token which had been brought him from Saint Germain. "Poor mother," said he, "how unhappy you would be if you saw the tortures that are inflicted on the poor children you guarded and protected, and who are now without defence. But I promise you, dear mother, that I will fill your vacant place." Then, opening his secretary, he satisfied himself that he had means sufficient to snatch the terrible receipt from the hands of the vile Doucet, if his lawyer did not immediately find other means of ridding him of his adversaries.

Whilst he was admiring the angelic sweetness of the portrait, he noticed a strange line that passed somewhat obliquely over the eyes, and gave as it were a different tone to a part of the face. On looking more closely he conjectured that a paper might have slipped behind, and as the effect of the colour seemed impaired by the contrast, he set about remedying the defect. It was easy to do, the back being held in place only by six small brads fixed in the frame. He removed them carefully, and a paper with an enclosure fell at his feet.

He picked it up with indifference, but presently he perceived on the envelope a word written in a tremulous hand. The reader may imagine the effect produced on George by that one word : it was the word *Will*.

He turned deathly pale ; his heart beat violently. Here then were the last words of an adored mother. It was for him it had been reserved to put her children in possession of her last wishes.

He tried to unfold the paper, which was not sealed, but his heart failed him. Leaving everything in disorder, he ran to his excellent friend Borghèse, and grasping her hand,—

“Read,” said he.

“What is the matter ?” said Borghèse. “How agitated you are. You want to make yourself ill then ? Is this the way to preserve the energy you will need to defend your friends ? Well, it is another stamped paper sent you from Saint Germain. It won’t kill you.”

It *was* a stamped paper which she held in her hand ; it had fallen out of the envelope.

She glanced at it, appeared surprised, and her face lighted up with evident satisfaction.

“George,” she said, “sit down there ; compose yourself ; be prepared to hear good or bad news with the firmness that becomes a man. How do you think to answer for the welfare of others if you are not master of yourself ? Come, I will let you off the rest of the sermon at present ; I will resume it another time. Steady now, and listen to the contents of this little paper sent to you by Providence.—But now I think of it, how did this precious document come into your hands ?”

“Behind the portrait of—our mother.”

“I understand all. Poor woman ! She sought for the safest, best protected place. ‘My children,’ she said to herself, ‘may lose all, but they will never part with their mother’s portrait.’ Then sickness came, and death overtook her before she had time to point out the place in which her treasure was hidden.”

“Her treasure !” cried George. “What do you mean ?”

“Listen to me attentively, and take notice that all marks of approbation are forbidden.”

And she read as follows :—

“I the undersigned Hercule Doucet, of Mantes la Jolie, Rue des Prés, No. 13, acknowledge to have received from Madame Duval, Widow, the sum of thirty thousand francs in specie, which sum is destined, firstly, to repay me the sum of ten thousand francs which I advanced to her, and secondly, to form a reserved fund of twenty thousand francs, which I will repay at her demand, upon receipt of notice in writing three months in advance; the said sum being moreover payable upon demand, without other notice, in case of the decease of the said Dame Duval, with interest at five per cent., from this date.

“Mantes la Jolie, 15, December, 18—

“Signed HERCULE DOUCET.”

“Well, George, my boy, God is leading us by the hand. What do you say to that? We have them fast, George, and your Doucet shall pay dear for his villainy!”

How shall we describe the joy and happiness of George? He saw peace and safety suddenly restored to the little white house: he could not master his emotion.

“Let us be off,” he cried, “dear Borghèse, let us not lose a moment in bringing them this grand news.”

“And this will?” said Borghèse. “Ought we not to see what it contains? It is not even sealed.”

“For goodness sake let us not touch so sacred a thing; it is a secret to which God alone should be witness.”

“You are right, George; you are coming to your sober senses again. Go quickly and tell your lawyer the news, and ask his advice. To-morrow I start for Saint Germain, for you have not yet leave to appear there, and you must keep your vow. But patience; your affairs are taking a favourable turn.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PLOT.

M. WOLFF was uneasy at the change which had taken place in George. He was delighted as ever with his capacity and his zeal, but believed he was unhappy, and tried once or twice to sound him on the subject; but George had always eluded his questions, by saying that he must be very ungrateful if he did not find happiness in such hospitality as he was enjoying. M. Wolff had even written to George's mother, and, in spite of the guardedness of her reply, he had guessed that there might be some affair of the heart at the bottom of the matter.

Like a practical man, he had set the ladies to work, judging that theirs was the agency through which there was most likelihood of making discoveries in the *pays du Tendre*.

Borghèse soon contrived to read that unsuspecting heart, and then a conspiracy was laid to bring about the *dénouement*. M. Wolff had learned that the lady of George's choice was worthy of all esteem, and that her interesting face bore a wonderfully close resemblance to a head by Correggio which was the pearl of his gallery. Moreover the charming picture of the symbolic basket had been exhibited there, and had been admired by all visitors.

M. Wolff would have given any money for that picture; but George, who would not have sold it for any money, had already disposed of it, having sent it to his mother, who

had expressed a wish that his *fiancée* should possess some accomplishment, as a recreation in prosperity and a resource in misfortune. He hoped by that means to dispose her the more to approve of his choice.

Madame Wolff was among the most eager to second her husband in the surprises which were in preparation for George, who was become in a measure the child of the house; and the secret, strange to say, was well kept.

"She must be very cruel then, this demoiselle Jeanne," said M. Wolff, "to keep her lover thus in exile for a whole year."

"It is a trial," replied Borghèse, "she will not believe in the impulsive ardour of a day, and will only put her trust in a durable affection."

"Well, well," observed M. Wolff, "she thinks herself very prudent, poor child, and she has just done the very thing to drive to madness the man she wants to cure of his impatience. But it is time to put an end to this trial; and, to punish Mademoiselle Jeanne for her cruelty, I will take it upon me to compel her even to come here and release George from his promise. Which of you ladies will join with me in this good design?"

The proposal was adopted with alacrity.

"I will tell you my plan," said M. Wolff. "George well deserves that we should try to be a little ingenious in devising measures for his establishment in life. He does not like pomp and show; any effort in that direction would be displeasing to him; we must think of something else. Borghèse, you have described to me like an artist that picturesque little white house, with which you were so much delighted, and towards which all the thoughts of our dear George are directed. We must have that house and her who reigns in it transported to this spot."

"Will you tell us how that is to be done?" said Borghèse.

"What can be easier? According to the poetic description you have given me of that miniature villa, is it not something like the pavilion at the bottom of our garden? Give us an exact plan and elevation of the house. Since you have been all over it, you must remember its interior arrangement, its furniture and fittings. We will answer for the rest."

The fine season having come round again, the project was very quickly and very secretly carried into effect. All admission into the garden was strictly forbidden. The workmen alone had the password, and went in and out through a little door. Every detail was imitated with the utmost exactness; the green trellices, and the pretty rose-trees in full bloom, transplanted as if by enchantment, climbed to the roof of the little building; and furniture, covered with chintz strewn with roses on a cheerful ground, was placed in the first floor rooms, which were an exact model of those of Jeanne and her sister.

Madame Wolff busied herself with glee about the thousand minutiae that might make the little home convenient and comfortable, and punctually fulfilled all the instructions given her by Borghèse, who acted as chief architect.

Everything can be got up to order in Paris. M. Wolff's ingenious kindness overlooked no details, and in the course of a few days the white house was ready.

The presses were filled with a complete trousseau; and china, glass, plate—all, of course, very simple and in good taste—were brought in secret, and placed in well-locked cupboards.

Drawing-paper, colours, crayons and so forth were laid on the table; nothing was forgotten, and nothing yet wanting except the flowers, which were to be brought at the last moment; and the conspirators, highly satisfied with themselves, and proud of their work, pledged themselves anew to keep their innocent plot a profound secret.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JUSTICE.

ONE dismal rainy day the two poor harassed sisters were sitting together, in their room in the white house. The north wind shook the casement with its dreary gusts, and stripped the rose-trees of their white blossoms, that fell like snow on the window sill.

"Another bad day," said Anna; "I have often remarked that this ugly weather brings us fresh vexations."

"That is to say, my poor sister," said Jeanne, "that you are not well, and that you ascribe your uneasy feelings to the weather. But you forget that fine weather will soon return, and maybe our glad days will come back too. We must not lose courage; have we not friends who have not forgot us?"

"But how can you believe, my poor Jeanne, that all their goodwill can extricate us from our difficulties? Have we not an engagement to meet, and pitiless creditors?"

"We have passed through very difficult times before now," replied Jeanne. "You despaired of getting work, and now you see we have more than we can do. We must never despair. Everything passes away and is forgotten, except one's faults, and God who watches over us."

Just then a carriage was heard to stop before the door—a very rare event, and one that struck the sisters with sad forebodings. Jeanne herself could hardly conceal her fears.

"Well," she said, "why do you distress yourself? I will give them their answer."

The carriage door was opened, and from it there issued, as if ejected from the throat of a venomous monster, four suspicious-looking personages.

Poor little white house, looking so like the chosen abode of peace and loving kindness, must thou be defiled by knaves and pettifoggers? for such are the odious names written on the faces of these unwelcome visitors.

Their steps sounded heavily on the stairs, and every step struck like an iron hammer on the hearts of the poor girls, who felt quite unable to contend against such numbers.

The first who entered the room was a stout man who tried to give himself a grave air, the better to impose upon his victims, but his natural joviality peeped out in spite of him on his big face. The reader will no doubt have recognised in him *Bénigne Doucet*.

The next was a co-heir, as long and thin as the first was short and thick. He was further distinguished by a hang-dog look, never enlivened by any touch of gaiety.

The third wore the white cravat and black garments of the men of the law. He was one of those sharp practitioners who are expert at running up costs, squeezing defendants dry, and making the estate of a deceased person produce a most abundant crop of stamped paper, without at all concerning themselves about what fruits it may yield to the surviving relations. He was tall and slender, with a ring of short black hair, like a monk's tonsure, encircling his shining bald pate, and yet he appeared still young. A nose, hooked like the beak of a vulture, threatened his chin. His eyes were wholly concealed by a pair of deep green spectacles. His mouth was small and close—a mere fissure without the least appearance of lips; his demeanour was icy, precise, and formal. This was *M. Corbin*.

The fourth, who carried a big pocket-book and writing materials, was *M. Seraphim*, broker. He was covered with one of those horrible oilskin wrappers that make men look like bales packed up for exportation. His vulgar face denoted that complete indifference to the most painful scenes which habit can give.

These four persons ranged themselves in a single line and saluted together, *M. Doucet* with amenity, the co-heir with insolence, *M. Corbin*, the attorney, with icy formality, and the broker awkwardly.

"Gentlemen," said Jeanne, "I should like to know how many of you have a right to come in here and force our door, and if it will be your pleasure to come to-morrow and bring a posse of six persons into this little room."

"Mesdemoiselles," replied M. Doucet, smiling, "there is nobody here in excess; I have brought only the persons indispensably requisite to verbalise; nor need you have any fears for to-morrow, for this business must be finished this very day."

Whereupon he motioned to the other three to be seated. The broker, like an actor well up to his part, placed himself at the painting table, and arranged his detestable apparatus. Anna snatched up the paintings that lay upon the table, and pushed away with disgust the big pocket-book that must have held within it so many writs and executions, so much misery and despair.

"I presume, gentlemen," she said, "that if you come here to verbalise, as you say, we shall be allowed to have someone to represent us, for we do not know what our rights are."

"You are at liberty to have yourselves represented, mesdames," said M. Corbin, bowing, "but our proceedings cannot be thereby stayed even momentarily." Then leaning back in his chair,—

"Broker," he said, "write."

M. Doucet rose, and began to examine as a connoisseur the sketches of flowers that hung on the walls; and he manifested strong admiration—he was fond of the fine arts.

M. Corbin began to dictate with a magisterial air :—

"At the request of M. Bénigne Doucet, proprietor in Mantes, and residing there, I, the undersigned, Aimé Seraphim, broker, &c.

"Whereas the Demoiselles Duval have acknowledged themselves indebted to the aforesaid Sieur Doucet in a sum of ten thousand francs, and have signed their acknowledgment thereof subsequently to their majority; and whereas the Sieur Doucet, relying on that promise, left the Demoiselles Duval the conditional use of the furniture which is part and parcel of the goods and chattels of their deceased mother; and whereas portions of the said furniture which is the pledge of the Sieur Doucet may disappear——"

"What," said Anna, "are we to be prohibited from disposing of what belongs to us?"

"That is my dictum," replied the man without eyes and lips, "you will reply at the foot of the warrant if you think fit."

And when the nasal voice of the attorney was silent, the steel pen continued to grate maledictions on the paper.

"By-the-bye," observed M. Doucet, "I observed here the other day, as a man could not fail to do who like me adores good paintings, I observed, I say, a female portrait which must be by the celebrated Latour—Latour, the glory of Saint Quentin, the charming, the inimitable artist in crayon! The present day produces nothing like his style. Latour carried his secret with him to the grave. Ah! what a charming thing is art!—But, after all, this portrait must be found. M. Corbin these young persons must be called upon to declare what is become of that Latour; they are not aware of the serious nature of the act they have committed."

The monotonous verbiage of a formal summons fell like an icy rain on the heads and the hearts of the poor sisters. They sat weeping in each others' arms in a corner of the room, thinking of their loving mother's portrait now claimed by these birds of prey; and amidst all her trouble Jeanne felt a secret joy in the thought that it was safe.

"Well, my dears," said M. Doucet, approaching them, "are we never going to be rational? You forget that with one word you may end all this affair to your own satisfaction. Just sign this declaration and we will rid you of this detestable broker who is worrying your brain, for you must suffer sadly, and it is painful to me, truly painful, for I am a good and humane man as all the town of Mantes la Jolie will tell you; it is greivous to me to come to this extremity."

And he held out a stamped paper to the two sisters.

"And if we sign," said Anna, after glancing at it, "you will give us back the bond you hold in your hands? and you will quit this house, all of you, on the instant, never to come back?"

"Certainly," said M. Doucet; "we are agreed on that point, though what you have just said is not very flattering

to us ; for we are acting with all possible civility," he added, appealing to his co-heir.

"Give it me that," said Anna, "we cannot pay too dear for the right to rid ourselves of this odious plot."

"Stop," said Jeanne, "we have been forbidden."

"But, my poor dear sister," said Anna, "can I leave you any longer exposed to these indignities ? What signifies the future ? God will help us."

And she seized a pen.

A sound was heard of horses' feet that seemed to halt and paw at the door, and whilst the two sisters were debating about what they should do, Jeanne still feebly holding back the pen in Anna's hand, an unexpected apparition complicated this scene, which had suspended the completion of the legal formalities.

Two young women in riding habits walked into the room.

A summer shower is soon over ; the sun, breaking through the clouds, was beginning to throw light on that scene of dark-dealing. The taller lady, in whom we recognize Borghèse, was accompanied by Madame Wolff. She cast a rapid glance over the persons in the room, and rushing up to Anna :—

"Don't sign," she cried, "the affair is settled."

All the spectators seemed struck with stupefaction. Anna and Jeanne pressed the hand of Borghèse, who presented her friend to them as a friend and protectress of their George.

"First of all," said Borghèse, turning to the company, "whom have we to do with here ? for we must not embroil ourselves with justice. You, Sir, who hold the pen"—turning to the man dressed in oilskin—"have the goodness to tell me your name and occupation, if you please."

"My name is Seraphin, sworn broker, I am here in the exercise of my functions," said the scribe, slightly intimidated.

"Sir, I am prepared to admit that you were discharging your duty here, but your functions are no longer needed since the parties are agreed. Please to accept payment for your time, for it is not just that you should have had your trouble for nothing."

And she laid a piece of gold on the stamped paper.

The broker, after casting a bewildered look on his companions, bowed respectfully and left the room.

"Now for you, Mr. Lawyer, what are your titles, that I may address you in language accordant with the consideration due to you?"

"Monsieur is my man of business," said Doucet, interposing; "he keeps an agency office; he is a man of great experience in matters of litigation, and well known at Mantes la Jolie."

"A man of business, eh?" said Borghèse, measuring the patient with her eyes. "But is he a notary, advocate, attorney, in short, something official and respectable?"

"I am a *practitioner*, Madam, and I am here in my right as proxy for M. Doucet."

"But, my dear Sir, one is not proxy for a man who is present in his own proper person. I am not a lawyer, but this, I should think, must be plain as an elementary principle to a practitioner. It is clear that one of you must quit the place, and in all justice it cannot be M. Doucet, since we have need of him to pay him his money."

And with her eyes she seemed to show the man with the green spectacles the way he must go.

"I protest against the violence which is done to me!" said M. Corbin, rising.

"*That is your dictum*," retorted Anna, timidly, opening the door for him.

"At last," said Borghèse, "the field of battle begins to be cleared. And now where is our third adversary?"

"He is my cousin and co-heir," said M. Doucet. "You need not look for him; he is here behind me."

And up he made rise the long figure of the cousin, who was glad enough to take himself off. He led a quiet life in the country; and that agitating scene, and that energetic Amazon, who spoke in so peremptory a tone and seemed to know so well what she was about, bewildered and alarmed him, and the whole thing was not to his taste.

"Now then, my dear Monsieur Doucet, we shall settle the affair between us two, without broker, practitioner, or the least bit of an attorney. What it is for people to understand one another! Let us come to the point: how much do you demand?"

"Madam," said Doucet, trying to talk big again, and

producing a receipt from his pocket-book, "I not only demand but I insist upon instant payment of this debt, without prejudice to such measures as I may be advised to take with reference to the impediments which you have offered to the exercise of my rights."

"You need not talk of that," said Borghèse; "there are no impediments, for we are agreed. The debt is ten thousand francs, you say? And it is for such a trifle you make this ado!"

Then dipping into her pocket-book with a careless air,—

"Have you a balance to hand over to me?" she said.

"Out of how much?" M. Doucet asked, with a look of astonishment.

"Out of thirty thousand francs," she replied, tapping the table with the handle of her whip and showing Doucet an open paper which she held up cautiously before him.

M. Doucet's legs could no longer hold him up, and he sank upon a chair.

"If you have not the money about you," said Borghèse, "you must go for it, or rather we will send and receive the difference."

The co-heir had already disappeared. Borghèse showed M. Doucet the door with exquisite politeness, and said, as she was in the act of closing it behind him:—

"In business one should never lose temper. I salute you with amenity."

Turning back into the room, she found Madame Wolff seated between the two sisters, who knew not how to express their gratitude.

"Tell me, Jeanne, was I not worthy of your namesake Jeanne d'Arc in the camp of the English? They all bit the dust!"

"And who sent us this unexpected help?" said Jeanne.

"Your mother," replied Borghèse, "and when you are more composed, my dears, you shall read the last commands of that loving mother, who still watches over you. It was George that made this fine discovery in examining the back of the portrait you lent him. But dry your tears," she said, embracing them cordially; "you have quite other things now to do than weeping. Will you join in our conspiracy for George's happiness?"

"Do what you please with us," said Jeanne.

"Well then, it will not be George who has broken his vow, but you, Jeanne, who will come to release him from it. Your days of trial are ended. His mother wishes you to marry as soon as possible. Your rooms, which you will find exactly like these, are ready for you in a separate building. You will be in your own home. We came on horseback, but we have also a carriage into which you will put whatever things are indispensable for the first few days, especially your drawings and paintings; everything else you will find ready to your hand. And beg Madame Blanchemain, your good neighbour, to come with you; you will feel more at home having her with you, until the grand day we have in view. But above all things take care you are not seen. George knows nothing, and M. Wolff desires that his pleasant surprise should be complete."

"Well, Anna," said Jeanne, kissing her sister, "do you still believe that stormy days are ominous?"

Then stopping a moment before the chaplet that adorned the crystal cup, and kissing the little cross,—

"We are at your service," she said, gaily. "Come, Anna, pack up all these drawing materials; I will run down to Madame Blanchemain."

An hour afterwards the two young ladies and their good neighbour were in the carriage, and the other two ladies cantering beside it.

"Louise," said Borghèse to her friend, "do you not feel happy in exerting yourself for the happiness of others? Is not this in truth living?"

"I never spent a more delightful day," replied Madame Wolff, "and you were sublime."

It seemed all a heavenly dream to Madame Blanchemain, and she talked and talked without end. The two sisters sat holding each other's hand, thinking of their mother and of George, of the past and the future.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT LAST !

It was evening when the carriage entered M. Wolff's premises by the back way. Dinner was ready in Jeanne's apartments, which, with the exception of a few indispensable additions, were an exact copy of those of the white house. Borghèse and Madame Wolff stayed to dinner, and saw that everything was provided for the accommodation of the new arrivals.

"But can we not see the poor exile this evening?" said Jeanne. "To know that he is so near us and still so unhappy!"

"It is too late," replied Borghèse, "and you have had agitation enough for one day. You have great need of rest. But do not distress yourself too much on his account. I will bring him good news and tell him that your troubles are ended. Sleep soundly, my dear girls, as you would in your little white house; your friends are near you."

Jeanne and Anna did not attempt to express their thanks in words. A look, a smile, a pressure of the hand said all.

When they were alone they knelt down and thanked God for these happy events. They found on a *prie-Dieu* the little diamond cross, attached to their mother's will. The latter contained no pecuniary bequests, but Jeanne read in it these few words, written with a dying hand:—

"Dear children, love each other in memory of me, and never part from each other. As long as you remain together I shall be with you."

How happy they were at having found in their own hearts and in George's the fulfilment of this revered injunction.

They passed a sleepless night that seemed as if it would never end, turning over in their minds the various incidents which had brought about such a change in their destiny. They were up by daybreak, and everything about them was set in order as carefully as in the little white house, when Borghèse came in and asked if M. Wolff could be admitted.

M. Wolff was struck with astonishment at the sight of Jeanne's placid face, which reminded him line for line of the ideal of his favourite Corregio. He thanked the young ladies for having consented to aid him in his little scheme, expressed his great affection for George, and spoke of what he proposed to do with a view to attach him to himself for ever.

"But, mademoiselle," he added, "absence from you deprived us of half his heart, and we could no longer do without you."

It was arranged that the ladies should remain in their apartments until the first interview had taken place; and M. Wolff, greatly tickled with the effect he intended to produce, went off to prepare the easily foreseen *dénouement*.

Two hours afterwards he was walking with George in the large English garden of the mansion.

"My dear George," said he, "we have now been working together for several years, and I have had full opportunity for appreciating your regard for me, your capacity, and your unwearied zeal.

"You have devoted yourself to my interests, and it is now time that I should think of yours, since you appear to forget them.

"I know that you have saved some money, and I propose to double it, so as to put you in a position to become a partner in the house of Wolff and Company. Does that suit you?"

"My dear Sir," replied George, "I was already bound to you by more acts of kindness than I could ever repay, and I had nothing to desire. I should therefore be only too happy at this fresh mark of your esteem and confidence."

"Well then," said M. Wolff, "we will go into the matter at once. Sit down there, while I go for a programme of a

deed of partnership which I have sketched out. This will be as good a place as any to look it over together."

So George remained seated on a bench in the garden, under a thick clump of acacias and hazels, adjacent to the pavilion which had been turned into a model of the white house.

His meditations ran upon his *protégées*; he knew that they were now out of their troubles, and that he himself was more and more in a position to make them safe for the future. His heart was swelling with these joyful reflections when he thought he heard through the foliage the sound of a chamber organ. Listening more closely, he soon recognised the same plaintive air which Anna was fond of playing, and which had made such an impression upon him one summer evening, the farewell evening, in the white house.

He rose, groped his way through the thicket, and could not believe his eyes when he saw before him a pavilion, with the basement parlour, and the white roses covering its front and clustering round the first-floor windows, in short, a perfect facsimile of the dwelling that was ever before his mind's eye.

The parlour window was opened.

"Well to be sure," said a familiar voice, "how proud you are grown, Monsieur George! You won't breakfast with us then?"

"You here, dear Madame Blanchemain! Have I lost my senses? Speak again. Surely I am dreaming, and I dread to be awakened."

"If you are dreaming, wide awake, that's not my fault," said Madame Blanchemain, opening the door, "we have changed our quarters, that's all."

George entered, with his eyes fixed as in a trance. "Take care," he said; "this is dangerous; this joy terrifies me." And he stared at that parlour, so like the one in which he had passed many a happy moment, and he stared at Madame Blanchemain, who begged permission of him to go on attending to her canaries.

"Aye, that's how it is," said she; "it seems you would not come to see us any more, and so we came and fixed ourselves here."

"We? She is with you then?"

"Why don't you go see? Don't you hear her sister at the piano?"

"For God's sake, come up with me, dear Madame Blanchemain, I can hardly stand."

"Come, boy," said Madame Blanchemain, "and learn to support joy as some day perhaps you will have to support sorrow."

They went up the little staircase together, and knocked at the door.

"Come in," said a joyous voice.

Jeanne was seated at the drawing-table, with a splendid bouquet before her.

"*At last!*" she said, rising and going to meet George.

Who could venture to describe those ecstatic moments in which two pure souls blend together in one feeling, and forget their sufferings in a smile.

Madame Blanchemain left them alone with each other.

"You have suffered too much!" said George.

"And you, too," said Jeanne, "but each of us has followed the path of duty, and God has taken pity upon us."

They were left some time to this sweet converse; then Anna, then their friend Borghèse, Madame Wolff and M. Wolff came round them. It was announced that breakfast was ready in Madame Blanchemain's parlour.

"How is this, George?" said M. Wolff. "I make an appointment with you to talk on business, and I find you in conversation with fair neighbours. We will come back to the subject, however, another time. Business to-morrow!"

Then he handed him a letter from his mother, informing him that she would come in a few days to be present at his marriage.

George threw himself with tears into M. Wolff's arms. He had not hands enough to respond to the testimonies of friendship given him by everybody.

And this was how the house-warming took place, on the occasion of the betrothal, in the new white house.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RESTITUTION.

IT was in the little church of Saint Germain that Jeanne and George chose to be united in the most unostentatious manner. They had issued only a very few invitations, but many unknown friends took an interest in the *dénouement* of their simple story.

When they passed under the peristyle, George took the holy water and presented it to Jeanne, saying,—

“Do you remember?”

She answered with a look.

It was before the Virgin’s chapel they knelt down. There George had prayed on the first day for the success of his enterprise.

Jeanne had neither the timid air which some brides affect at the altar, nor the free-and-easy gaiety which others put on to conceal their agitation; her charming face showed the calmness and serenity of duty fulfilled.

Her figure, flexible as a blade of grass, showed even on that day no trace of any constraint.

Her bridal costume was exceedingly simple, and remarkable only for a wreath of briar roses which looked like life. In the symbolic bouquet that quivered in her girdle the eye was attracted by a drooping columbine, showing within its light-tinted blossom a beautiful dew drop, which was in reality a fine pearl. This was a present from Madame Wolff. The diamond cross, a family heirloom, hung from Jeanne’s neck by a black velvet ribbon, and even the poor

pin had not been forgotten ; it rested, proud and happy, upon the bosom of the bride.

All eyes were bent on Jeanne, and she bore it well, replying to those whom she recognised with a friendly sign.

"She has nothing," said a mother to her daughter.

"Does he take the two sisters, then?" said another lady.

"It is the best thing he could do," replied a third, "for one of them could not live without the other."

"The good God will bless them," said some poor people, whom George had not forgotten.

A stop was put to their comments by a rich strain of music, in which George had no difficulty in recognising the skilful touch of his friend Borghèse.

The good Abbé R—, the confidant of Jeanne's inmost thoughts, delivered a touching and ingenious address to the congregation. He took for his text the words of the Gospel *Seek and ye will find*, and though he confined himself within generalities, and abstained, as was becoming, from all allusion to the adventures of the new-married couple, his attentive hearers called to mind all that George had been enabled to *find* by his spirit of study and observation, from a pin to the precious wife whom he had asked of God in that same place, and whom he had led that day to the Virgin's altar.

M. Wolff, who had attended Jeanne to church, presided at the marriage banquet which was given in his house. He had the bride on his right, and on his left George's good mother, happy to her heart's content in the happiness of her beloved son.

George was placed between Mesdames Wolff and Borghèse, the two beneficent fairies who had prepared this joyous scene. Good Madame Blanchemain was radiant.

When George was alone with Jeanne, she leaned on his shoulder and said, in a low voice, "Take back this pin, it is fairly yours."

CHAPTER XXX.

POSTSCRIPT.

THUS it was that I, poor little pin, returned to the possession of my dear master.

The increase of his fortune would have allowed him to have a costlier country house, but he bought of good Madame Blanchemain, and preserved unaltered, the little house at Saint Germain.

If any reader ask how I have been able to relate so many circumstances at which I was not present, it must be understood that all the events of this simple story were often talked of in my presence in the young household.

And would you like to know where I rest to-day? Go back to the little room that looks out upon the far horizon, and the window of which is encompassed with roses.

There is a cradle in the middle of the room, and all around it are gazing in silence on a pretty sleeping infant. George holds the hand of Jeanne; Anna, the second mother of the little angel, has paused in the midst of her household occupations to look at it. "It will be the very image of Jeanne," says Madame Blanchemain, taking a pinch of snuff.

And I, poor little pin, am fastening the snow-white swaddling clothes of the sleeping babe.

But ask me no more. We leave our friends at the height of human felicity. Those delicious moments are of short duration; sorrow, that inevitable guest, will come, and the pin that now hears the beating of that little heart, will one day perhaps fasten a shroud.

Meanwhile, since every fable has its moral, let us see what that is which may be drawn from this true story.

If George had not loved and revered his father, he would not have been careful, in remembrance of him, to observe his most trivial directions, and he would not have stooped to pick up a pin.

If he had not picked it up and fastened it on his sleeve, he would not have attracted M. Wolff's notice.

If he had not loved beauty and goodness, he would not have encountered at Munich the image of her whom the future had in store for him.

If he had not acquired experience in works of art, he would not have been sent to the Jardin des Plantes, to find there that same person whose image already dwelt in his mind.

If he had not been a worthy, amiable young man, he would not have won the sisterly affection of Borghèse, who led him as it were by the hand.

If he had yielded up his pin to the whim of a fair lady, he could not have lent it to his charming incognita, nor formed that first slender link which began to unite the destinies of both.

If he had sought only his own pleasure, he would not have applied himself to the study of a foreign language, he would not perhaps have gone to America, nor found at the other end of the world a means of being useful to his *protégées*.

If he had insisted on having back his pin, when, in obedience to Jeanne, he had to submit to a painful exile, he would have been less worthy of her.

If he had not turned into the church on entering Saint Germain, perhaps he would not have found her for whom his heart yearned, or at least he would not have entered her dwelling with so pious a disposition.

And on what did all this hang?

ON A PIN.

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